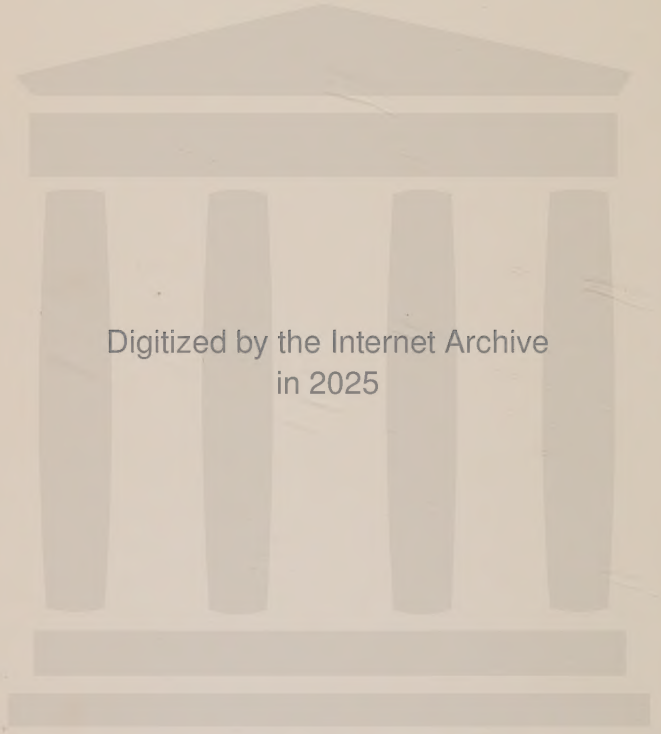

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SERMONS,

AND

MORAL DISCOURSES,

ON THE

IMPORTANT DUTIES OF CHRISTIANITY.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF

PERE BOURDALOUE, S.I.

BY THE REV. A. CARROLL, S.J.

PREACH THE WORD: BE INSTANT IN SEASON, OUT OF SEASON; REPROVE, ENTREAT, REBUKE IN ALL PATIENCE AND DOCTRINE.—2 *Tim.* c. iv. v. 2.

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SERMONS.

SERMON XVII.

ON TEMPTATION.

For the First Sunday in Lent.

"*Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted by the devil; and when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he afterwards was hungered.*" MATT. iv.

Is it not astonishing, beloved Christians, that the Son of God, who came down upon earth, (as St. John tells us,) with a view to overturn the works of Satan, should condescend to experience in his own person the assaults and wiles of that ghostly tempter? But to this he was induced, (as St. Augustin observes,) for four great reasons, every one of which had a direct tendency to promote our welfare. We were too frail and weak to undergo temptation, and he would supply us with strength. We were too timid and dastardly, and he would inspire us with courage. We were too imprudent and rash, and he would teach us to be cautious. We wanted experience, and were little versed in the art of withstanding the art of our common enemy, and he would instruct us in it.

Now this he doth admirably in the passage I have quoted. For, (according to the thought and expression of St. Gregory,) he supplied us with strength to overcome temptations, by his own temptations, as by his own death he overcame ours. He inspired us with courage and resolution, by sharing the same combat, as nothing could encourage us more effectually than the example of a God-man, our Sovereign Pontiff, who was (according to St. Paul's words) "in all points tempted, like as we were." Heb. iv.

He taught us vigilance and circumspection, by showing us that no one should hold himself secure; since he himself, the saint of saints, was liable to be tempted. He gave us knowledge and understanding, by discovering the arms we ought to make use of in our own defence, and by laying down the rules which were to be observed in this spiritual warfare.

Thus a great prince, to repulse his enemies, and disconcert their measures, is not content with levying forces, and issuing out orders, but puts himself the first at the head of his armies, encourages them by his presence, leads them on by his prudence, animates them by his valour, and, notwithstanding the obstacles and dangers they meet with, makes them sure of victory. And if such be the efficacy, such the prevalence of royal example, as you well know, Christians, and of which you have been witnesses oftentimes yourselves, what must be that of a saving God? This is, undoubtedly, one of the most important subjects I can treat of, or discuss in the pulpit; a subject, than which none requires more attention, or deeper reflection. Among so great a number of excellent lessons which the gospel lays down in the present narrative, concerning the manner in which it is our duty to behave in temptation, I shall single out two, to which I shall confine myself, and which naturally arise from the words of my text. The first is, that this divine Master goes not into the wilderness, where he suffers temptation, but by the suggestion and guidance of the holy Spirit: "Led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted." The second, that before he is tempted, he prepares for it by fasting, and by mortifying the senses: "And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, the tempter came to him." And from hence I shall make two deductions, both the one and the other extremely profitable, and no less necessary.

In what manner soever, God, by the decrees of his infinite wisdom, may have previously appointed the disposition of his graces, which St. Augustin denominates, predestination, these three things are evident and incontestable in the principles of faith, namely; that the assistance of grace is necessary, in order to overcome temptation; that there is no temptation which may not be overcome by the assistance of grace; and finally, that God, by an engagement of fidelity, never fails to strengthen us with grace in temptation.

I cannot, without grace, overcome temptation. This is an

article long since decided against the Pelagians. Now when I say overcome, I mean that victory of which St. Paul speaks, when he says, "that a man is not crowned, except he strive lawfully." 2 Tim. ii. A victory which results from the spirit of Christianity; a victory meritorious in the sight of God; a victory for which the conqueror shall one day be rewarded in heaven. For, to subdue one temptation by another temptation, one vice by another vice, one sin by another sin; to subdue revenge by avarice, avarice by pleasure, pleasure by ambition: these are the virtues and victories of the world, in which grace hath no share. But to surmount, for God, and righteousness' sake, all these temptations, and the world itself, is a victory peculiar to grace and our faith: "And this is the victory which overcometh the world, our faith." 1 John v.

There is no temptation which is not surmountable with God's assistance; this is another essential maxim in religion, for which St. John assigns an excellent reason; for (says he) "greater is he who is in you [by his grace] than he who is in the world," (1 John iv.) and reigns in it in quality of prince of the world. It is to offer an injury to God, therefore, to suppose, that temptations cannot be surmounted, and to say, what nevertheless is so often said: I cannot bear up against such a passion; I cannot make head against such a custom, and such a propensity. There is more of infidelity, (according to St. Bernard,) than of weakness in expressions of this nature; because, by thus speaking, either we consider only our own strength, and, in that sense, indeed, the proposition is true; but we are faithless in separating our own strength from that of God; or we suppose grace, and the divine assistance; and in that sense, the proposition is not only false, but, moreover, heretical; because faith teaches, that "we can do all things through Jesus Christ our Lord, who strengthens us." Phil. iv.

But have we always this assistance of God in temptation? This is that which remains to be explained, and which I purpose to make the subject of the following discourse, in which I fear not to promise, that I shall, without embarrassing the imagination, or confusing the mind, or advancing aught but what will edify you, throw light upon whatever is most important and solid relating to grace.

Yes, beloved Christians, it is an article of our faith, that God, at no time, permits us to be tempted above our strength: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which

you are able." 1 Cor. x. Now this ability we have only through grace, which, therefore, is never wanting on the part of God, not only to repel, but to draw advantage from, the sallies of temptation: for "he will make with the temptation a way to escape." 1 Cor. x. This is the doctrine of the great apostle, and this we cannot doubt of, unless we preposterously figure to ourselves a supreme Being without mercy and without Providence. But how true soever all this may be, there is still a mistake but too common in the world, and discoverable in the greater part of mankind; it is to suppose that these graces are imparted to us, such as we would have them, and at the time we would have them be imparted to us: a gross mistake, the consequences of which are extremely pernicious, and which I look upon as of the utmost importance to rectify. In order to lay my plan the more clearly before you, I must here distinguish between two sorts of temptations: one, in which we engage against the order of God, and of our own accord; the other, in which we are overtaken by a kind of necessity annexed to our condition.

First then, I say, that when temptation is voluntary, we expect to no purpose the assistance of God, if we do not quit the occasion of it; nor must we then promise ourselves the grace to resist it, but the grace to fly from it.

Secondly, I say, that though temptation be involuntary, we shall have to no purpose the grace of resistance, if we be not, ourselves, resolved to resist it, particularly in imitation of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by mortifying the flesh.

Both these propositions abound with solid instruction, and are well deserving of your serious attention.

Part I. Whatever obligation we may sometimes be under, as in fact we are, of risking our lives, it is an incontestable truth, founded in that primary law of charity which we owe to ourselves, that we are never permitted to venture our salvation. Now, it is evident that we do so, and therefore, that we sin as often as we rashly engage in temptation. My meaning is this: there is no one who hath not, internally and externally, originals of temptation peculiar to himself: internally, passions and habits; externally, opportunities and importunities, which he must personally guard against, and which are sources of temptation in his regard. For with great propriety we may say of temptation, what St. Paul said of grace: that as there is in us a diversity of graces and inspira-

tions, all which proceed from one and the same spirit of sanctity, and which Almighty God, who operates in us, makes use of, though differently, in order to convert us and bring us to salvation; so also there is in us a diversity of temptations, which one and the same spirit of iniquity raises up against us, in order to corrupt us, and lead us to perdition. We are sufficiently apprised what that foible is, through which he mostly, and most vehemently attacks us; and if we give but ever so little attention to our own conduct, we easily discern, not only the temptation which predominates in us, but the particular circumstances which enhance the danger of it. For (as St. Chrysostom judiciously remarks) what is temptation for one man, is not so for another; what may be the occasion of one man's fall, may be no way dangerous with regard to another; and many there are, who, though firm and unshaken amidst the most enormous scandals in the world, yet, on account of the particular disposition they are in, unhappily miscarry for (if I may so call it) the veriest trifle. To know the danger, and not to fly from it, is what I call exposing one's self, against the order of God, to temptation. Now I maintain, that a Christian should not then expect the assistance of those graces, which are given him to resist and overcome temptation. I maintain that he hath no right to petition, or even to hope for them. I proceed still farther, nor am I afraid to add, that although he should petition for them, God, in the ordinary course of his Providence, is expressly determined to give him a denial. How can I address myself in stronger terms to those presumptuous souls, in order to let them see the irregularity of their conduct, and induce them to come back into the prudential and holy ways of righteousness?

No, Christians; whoever inadvisedly, and against God's order, rushes into temptation, must not hope for those graces of protection and defence, of resistance and conflict, so necessary to support us. Under what colour can we ask them of God? Under colour of justice? No, they would no longer be graces, or gifts of God, if God owed them as a debt. Under colour of fidelity? No, God never promised them. Under colour of mercy? To that, by his presumption, he puts a voluntary obstacle, and renders himself unworthy of the divine mercies. He is, therefore, so long as he remains in this state, and is willing to remain in it, destitute of help on the part of God, and deprived of all right and title to grace; I mean that grace of which St. Augustin speaks, and which he

styles victorious, inasmuch as it is by it that we vanquish temptation.

I say more: not only we must not on these occasions presume, or suppose that God will afford us his victorious grace; we must be assured he will not, because he hath so declared, and because no doctrine is more clearly set forth in the scripture than this, namely; that to punish the rashness and presumption of a sinner, God abandons him, and gives him up to his corrupt desires. And tell me not, that God is faithful to his promise, and that his promise is (according to St. Paul) not to suffer us to be tempted above that which we are able. God is faithful to his promise; but these are two very different things: not to suffer us to be tempted above that which we are able, and to give us what degree of ability we please, whenever we throw ourselves into temptation. One is by no means a consequence of the other; and God may refuse us, without prejudice to his promise, a favour for which we cannot reasonably hope. He is faithful to his promise; but when, or where, hath he promised to succour the man in temptation who seeks the temptation? To reason with propriety, and on the principles of faith, we would invert the proposition, and conclude in this manner: God is faithful to his promise, nay, infallible in his words; he will, therefore, refuse to aid him in temptation, because he hath so told us in express terms. Now it is as much the concernment of God's fidelity as to make good the truth of this formidable threat: "He that loveth the danger shall perish in it;" (Ecclus. iii.;) as it is to fulfil this comfortable promise; "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able." 1 Cor. x.

But waving the promises and menaces of God, let us consider the thing as it is in itself. Why, truly, beloved hearers, if a man should rashly, and of his own accord, run into temptation, and should voluntarily harbour the cause and origin of it, how doth it become him to implore and expect the assistance of heaven? But had it been the desire of promoting the greater glory of God, or a necessary obligation, or a charitable motive, or accident, or surprise, that induced you to take this dangerous step, his Providence had watched over you, and had sooner worked a miracle, than suffered you to fall. And, indeed, when Christian virgins, in the days of persecution, were committed to places of prostitution and debauchery, with a view to ruin them, the grace of God went after them.

When the prophets of Israel, to fulfil their duty, appeared in the courts of idolatrous princes, the grace of God accompanied them. When the fathers of the desert, in obedience to the call and inspiration of God, relinquished their retreats, and repaired to infamous dissolute towns, to exhort the people and reclaim them to penance, the grace of God went along with them. It acted within them, and impelled them to action. It gained illustrious victories, and made glorious conquests. And because he was himself the guardian of their way, and ensurancer of their salvation, they were proof against every thing. But you, upon principles extremely different, give yourselves up to whatever is most dangerous for you, and most capable to pervert you. With a view of satisfying your evil propensity, you are taken up with loose friends, loose company, and loose conversation, that would corrupt (if I may venture so to speak) the angels themselves. With a view of indulging in some favourite passion, or influenced by weakness and vicious ductility, you give free admittance to contagious persons, domestic demons, who perpetually watch for an opportunity of seducing you, and instilling into you the seductive poison which they carry in their breasts. With a view of procuring insignificant pleasure, you run to exhibitions, and are seen at assemblies, which are capable of mortally wounding your heart. With a view of gratifying a hellish curiosity, you devour books without discrimination, not scrupling to peruse even those which have a direct tendency to debauch the imagination by lascivious narratives, and amorous adventures; or to pervert the understanding by their impious principles, and scoffs at religion. And you, woman of the world, through an unfortunate vanity, peculiar to your sex, do everything in your power to appear at all places of public resort, to attract admiration, to see and be seen, to shine in company, to set yourself off with all the advantages of an affected luxury; and in this disposition you have the presumption to expect that God, in his goodness, will support and protect you. Now I say, on the contrary, that he will withdraw his arm, that he will suffer you to fall; and that although from motives of worldly prudence, you should avoid those crimes, which in the eyes of the world itself are accounted abominable, yet you will fall into others of not so deep a dye, but mortal, nevertheless, with regard to salvation. I say that those graces, on which you ridiculously build your hopes, were not intended to confirm resolution in such circumstances, and that you may despair of

obtaining them, while your life is so disorderly as I suppose it to be. This is what I advance as a maxim the most incontestable, and the most solidly authorised by the three great rules of moral agency, namely; by experience, by reason, and by faith. This is the great, the capital point, which you and I must invariably adhere to through our whole conduct and plan of life.

Ah! my brethren (says the pious St. Bernard) were it true, as you would persuade yourselves, that God was disposed to protect and uphold us, as well when we throw ourselves against his order into the danger of sinning, as when we are innocently surprised, we must admit that the saints took wrong measures and needless precautions on this head. Those men, so renowned for the sanctity of their lives, and who are proposed for our imitation; those men, so consummately skilled in the science of salvation, would have understood it but ill, if grace had been indifferently imparted to him who courted the temptation, and to him who feared it; to him who excites it and takes delight in it, and to him who avoids it. In vain should you break off all communication with the world, and shut yourselves up in holy retirement, if, in the most corrupt communication with the world, you might make sure of God and his all-powerful protection.

Why had St. Jerom so great a horror of worldly pomp? Why was he disturbed, as he witnesses himself, at the remembrance of things which he had seen at Rome? He might have quitted his solitude, and joined once more his former associates. He might, without fear, have resorted to, and indulged in all the softness and effeminacy of female conversation. Why did this great, this celebrated master in a spiritual life, this doctor of the church, so wise and so enlightened, oblige that holy virgin, Eustochium, to refrain for ever from certain liberties, which are mostly taken without scruple; concealed appointments, frequent visits, ambiguous words and of double meaning; humorous letters and artfully obscure; professions of affection, and all the formalities of a growing friendship? Why, I say, did he rebuke her for all these, as for so many crimes? Why did he make her so much apprehend the consequences of them, if he knew that God had taken care to provide us with an infallible preservative, and a never-failing remedy always at hand?

In fine, when the fathers of the church so zealously inveighed against the abuses and scandals of theatrical exhibitions; when they

obliged the faithful to renounce them for ever, in consequence of their baptism, those vehement invectives we should regard as figures, and those pathetic discourses as exaggerations. But think what you will of it, beloved hearers, it is hard that the saints should have been all deceived; and in matters of conscience I had rather be impelled by their example, than be influenced by the world and all its adherents. For, the saints spoke and acted by the spirit of God; and error ever was, and will be incompatible with the Spirit of God.

But let us proceed to the fountain-head; and in order to ascertain still more fully the truth of this doctrine, let us try to make appear from what source it flows. Why doth not God give his grace to a sinner who lays himself voluntarily open to temptation? To promote the advantage and credit of his grace. And for this Tertullian gives a very natural and very solid reason. The aid (says he) of the Deity, in any other supposition, would be a foundation and pretext for the rashness of man. This, then, is the meaning of that father: Almighty God, liberal and bountiful as he is, must in such a manner dispose of his graces, that they make us not live in a presumptuous confidence. This proposition is clear and evident. Now did I know, that in the temptations to which I expose myself against his will, he would infallibly assist me, I should not imagine circumspection needful; I should slight his counsels, and overlook the dictates of Christian prudence, equally invincible, whether I sought or avoided the danger. And thus, instead of making me watchful and humble, the influence of God would make me proud and remiss.

What then doth God do? Seeing me prepossessed with an error so injurious to his very sanctity, he deprives me of his grace, and obviates the reproach which might be made to his Providence: that he had countenanced my libertinism, and authorized my temerity. It is a great mistake (says St. Cyprian) to imagine, that the spiritual force and power of grace, which ought to overcome temptation in us, or help us to overcome it, is left to our discretion. God keeps it in store for the wise and provident, not for the negligent and inconsiderate Christian, imparting it only to righteous souls, who know their own weakness, and are perpetually on their guard. But as to those audacious, precipitate Christians, who go on without reflection in their evil courses, he makes a point of leaving them to the desires of their own heart. And this chastise-

ment, however terrible, is perfectly commensurate with the nature of their sin.

For, what doth a Christian do, when the instigation and capriciousness of a ruling power neither alarm him, nor induce him to prevent temptation? He tempts God: and to tempt God is one of the greatest and most hateful inordinations of which man is capable; an inordination which (according to the fathers) offends directly against the first duty of the Christian religion: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Matt. iv. Now for this the sinner can undergo no punishment more severe, than that of God's dereliction. Hear how St. Thomas reasons upon the matter. In the language of scripture (says he) God may be tempted three several ways: first, when we desire that he would work a miracle without necessity; and this is the case of those Pharisees mentioned in St. Luke: "Others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven." Luke xi. They asked him to show them a prodigy in the air. But what was their view in making this petition? It was to tempt him. Secondly, when we try to set bounds to his omnipotence; and with this it was that the amiable Judith reproached the Bethulians, who, when besieged by Holofernes, despairing too soon of succour from above, were ready to capitulate, and deliver themselves up: "Who are you, (says she) that tempt the Lord?" Jud. viii. "You have a set time for his mercy." Lastly, when we are false to him, not maintaining an open, upright conduct towards him. Thus, the Jews perfidiously presented a piece of coin to Christ, and wished him to tell them, if it were expedient they should pay tribute to Cæsar. "Why tempt ye me, (answers he,) ye hypocrites?" Matt. xxi. In this manner (says St. Thomas) is God tempted; these are the three different branches of this sin.

A Christian, who, presumptuously relying on grace, throws himself into temptation, is guilty at once of all these three different kinds of sin. For, first, he desires a miracle of God without necessity; because, doing nothing for his own preservation, he expects that God will, alone, preserve him; and, not making use of the grace he hath, hopes that God will supply him with the grace he hath not. The grace he hath, is a grace of flight; but he will not fly. The grace he hath not, is a grace of conflict; but reckoning nevertheless, that God will combat for him, he faces the danger; that is, he subverts, or at least would subvert, all the laws of Providence. Regularly he should withdraw from the occasion of

sinning, because it is in his power; but he will not. He presumes, however, that God will protect him, and by an extraordinary concurrence, withhold him from perdition. Is not this to desire a most needless miracle? When God was for preserving Lot and his family from the flames of Sodom, and ordered him to leave that reprobated town, had he refused the condition, and chosen to remain in the midst of the flames, still imploring the miraculous interposition of heaven, how would, how should, the petition have been received? Now this expressly sets forth the nature of our daily conduct. We want, in places where the fire of concupiscence is lighted up on all sides, that God would enable us, by his special grace, to escape its influence. We go into all places, we hear and see everything, we dread no connexions, we make but slight reflections on our own weakness; and yet we expect that God will shield us against so many dangers, and make us invulnerable to so many shafts. But God can find means of keeping us to order, and baffling our presumption; for he says to us directly what he said to Lot: "Stay not in the country all about." Gen. ix. Stay not in Sodom, or in the adjacent places; stay not in the company of wicked men, in evil communication, in scenes of debauchery: I will work no miracle on your account: I consent, from this moment, to your eternal ruin, unless by a wise and speedy retreat you prevent the misfortune that hangs over and threatens you. "Stay not in the country all about."

Accordingly, Christians, it is very remarkable, that the Son of God, who might easily have accepted the challenge given him by the tempter in the gospel; who, without hazard, might have cast himself down from the top of the pinnacle, and, by so doing, have put his enemy to shame, was content to repulse him with these words: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." And at this (says St. Augustin) we must not be surprised, because this enemy of our happiness must be foiled by the vigilance of man, and not by a miracle of God's omnipotence. To hear the holy fathers deliver their sentiments on this head, one would think that they had adopted the doctrine of Pelagius. All their propositions, however, are orthodox, as they exclude not grace, but the miracle of grace. And it was this that made the saints so timorous, so cautious, so attentive to themselves. But we, more knowing in the dispensations of God than God himself, carry our affiance in his divine protection to a higher degree. For the father of lies says:

"Cast yourselves down;" (Matt. iv;) throw yourselves, fearless, into this abyss; visit this person; keep up this connexion: "he hath given his angels charge concerning you." Matt. iv. Thus he speaks to us, thus we hearken to him, thus we persuade ourselves, that the angels of heaven will come down to our assistance: I mean, that we shall feel the influence of divine grace. And forthwith, we shut our eyes, in order to proceed in slippery paths with greater confidence; and instead of answering, like Christ our Lord: "thou shalt not tempt," thou shalt not make trial of God's omnipotence, without hesitation we leave all to chance; we expect that God will do that for us, which he would not do for his divine Son; we ask of him a miracle, which (if I may venture to use the expression) he refuses himself.

Further: at the same time that the sinner presumes to tempt God, with regard to his omnipotence, he hath the boldness to tempt him with regard to his mercy; not by setting bounds to it, like the priests of Bethulia, but by extending it, on the contrary, beyond the limits which he himself hath prescribed. For, his mercy (says St. Augustin) is only stored for those who are taken in the toils of temptation against their will; and yet we would have it be granted to those who entangle themselves in it, who make it familiar to them, who love, and are pleased with its destructive snares; as if we were masters of God's graces, and had it in our power to dispose of them at pleasure. "Now who are we, therefore, who tempt the Lord?"

In fine, we tempt God by hypocrisy, when we implore his assisting grace in temptation, from which we are still afraid to be delivered, and which we refuse to banish. God might well answer us as Christ did the Jews: "Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?" Matt. xxii. For we ask him for one thing with our lips, while in our mind, and in our hearts, we desire another. We beg of him to withdraw us and screen us from temptation, while yet we approach against his prohibition. We say, Lord! cast an eye of compassion on our weakness, and save us from the violence and surprises of the tempter; and, notwithstanding this, by a monstrous contradiction, we become our own tempters. We perform in ourselves, and against ourselves (as St. Gregory, pope, excellently observes,) a diabolical agency. Tell me, is not this to dissemble with God, and to offer him insult?

This, beloved hearers, (give me leave to apply it to you in a

particular manner) will make you eternally inexcusable in the presence of God. When we reproach you with faults, you allege for excuse your situation in life, pretending that the court, at which you reside, is the abode of inevitable, insurmountable temptations. It is thus you discourse, and thus you ascribe to other causes, that which takes its rise in your own breasts. But the ways of God must be justified in a matter, in which his Providence is so nearly concerned. This idle pretext being once exploded, you will be necessitated to hold another language, and humbly to acknowledge the irregularity of your conduct.

Yes, Christians, I own it is at court, that temptations have taken up their fixed habitation; alluring temptations which can scarce be resisted; vehement temptations, to which the most resolute are often wont to yield. But for whom are they such? For those who do not come there by the call of God; for those who are instigated by ambitious views; for those who endeavour to advance by intrigue; for those who seek only to make a worldly fortune; for those who remain there contrary to their duty, profession, and conscience; for those who are asked, what they do, and what they came for; for those of whom it is said, they are there but should be elsewhere; in a word, for those who are not led by the Spirit of God. Are you of this character, and in this category? Then I agree that you will suffer shipwreck almost infallibly. It is an impetuous tide that bears you away. For how can you stem it, since God is not with you? But are you stationed at court, in the order of Providence? That is, have you fixed your abode there by the divine appointment? Do you hold the rank there that is given you by your birth? Are you there by office? Were you summoned there by your sovereign? Do you stay there for a necessary and indispensable reason? No, Christians, the temptations of the court are no longer invincible temptations for you. For, it is an article of faith, not only that God had previously afforded you graces to overcome them, but the graces which he affords you have a peculiar fitness to bring about your sanctification in the very midst of the court.

If then your perdition be effected at court, attribute not your misfortune to the many temptations which at court are unavoidable, but to yourself, and to your infidelity, and to your want of resolution, as the Holy Ghost tells you in express terms: "Thou hast destroyed thyself." Osee xiii. And truly is it not at the courts of

princes, that, in every age, in spite of temptations, the greatest virtues have been practised, the greatest victories have been obtained, the greatest sanctity hath been acquired, and may still be acquired? In places equally laborious and honourable, to be perpetually beset with selfish, invidious, insatiable men; to spend days and nights in examining and adjusting the affairs of others, in hearing complaints, in giving out orders, in holding councils, in negociation, in deliberation, all these, and a thousand other irksome affairs, undertaken with a view of pleasing the sovereign Lord of all things, are means sufficent for raising you to a sublime degree of holiness.

But whence oftentimes doth the evil flow? From this, that at court, where you are engaged by duty, you proceed considerably beyond your duty. For, do you reckon it a duty to bestir yourself so much? To be concerned in so many private designs? To form so many schemes? To waste away with vexation? To draw upon yourself so many differences and quarrels? To let yourself so often be inwardly disturbed? To indulge yourself with so many needless curiosities? To meddle officiously with so many affairs? To run up and down in quest of divertisements? But let us be more particular on this head, and let us go on a little farther. Do you think such and such a connexion your duty—a connexion of which passion is the only link, and which you ought to break? So great assiduity in your attendance on an object, with which you sympathize, and from which you should separate?

I cannot do it, say you. You cannot do it! But I maintain that you can; yes, I maintain, that by so saying you tell a lie to the Holy Ghost, and commit against his grace a grievous outrage. Have you a mind that I should convince you of it, and in a clear and obvious manner, too, so clear and obvious, as to make you allow, that libertinism itself hath nothing to oppose? It is not to shame you, but to instruct you as my brethren, whose salvation is dearer to me than my very life. The disposition you are in is favourable to me, and the Lord hath inspired me to draw advantage from it. It supplies me with a strong, cogent reason, which you little expected, and which will be sufficient for your condemnation, if you make it not, to-day, the motive of your conversion. Be attentive, and judge.

There are some among you (and I pray God they be not the greater number) who, at the time of my speaking, are actually

engaged in sinful courses: so strongly, so closely engaged, as to aver they despair of ever being able to break their chains. To beg of them for the sake of their souls' salvation, not to see such a person, they say, would be to beg of them an impossibility. But were the service of our sovereign, on a ready obedience to whom we plume ourselves, to summon them away, would this separation be accounted impossible? I will be witnessed by themselves. Is there one of them all, who, in order to give proof of his loyalty and zeal, is not ready at this moment to set out and leave the object of his tenderest affection behind? When the rumour of war begins first to spread, each offers his service, each thinks of going forth to meet the enemy. He is detained by no tie; he is hurt by no absence, and is determined to manfully disregard its irksomeness. Did I call this in question, you would take offence at it; and now that I lay it down as an undoubted truth, it passes for an eulogy, and you are pleased with my words. I make no comparison between what is required of you by worldly maxims, and what you are commanded by the law of God. I know that by following the maxims of the world, you preserve in your hearts the same passion which it is incumbent on you to renounce for God. And, indeed, it is but just that there be a wide distance between the one and the other, and that I do more for God, who reigns in heaven, than for all the powers who rule the earth. But thence I infer only, that you tell God an untruth, when you boldly assert, that it is not in your power to relinquish the person who causes or occasions your evil doings; and, in order to try yourself, to abstain for some time from her presence and conversation. For I ask you again, will this be a hinderance, when honour shall call you? With what speed shall we see you running, flying to arms, on the first intimation of his majesty's orders? How happy will you be in your own estimation! What transports will you feel on receiving the intelligence! Whoever should hesitate a single moment, would he deserve to live? Would he dare to show his face? Would he not be the scorn, the sport and mockery of mankind?

Ah! Christians, let us own the truth; we have too much infringed, nay, too much disparaged, the rights of God. If the service of man be the things we are about, we hold ourselves tied to every engagement: everything is sacrificed; and so it ought to be, as it perfectly concords with the order of God. But if the cause of God be the point in hand, everything is an obstacle; it is

flanked by difficulties that crowd on all sides, and our courage fails us in endeavouring to surmount them. Even those who should oppose this decay of morals, the priests of Jesus Christ, for all their zeal, are led into error by false pretexts, with a view to moderate the rigour of their decisions. They hearken to a worldling; they respect his judgment in a more than ordinary manner; they allow him time; they say that the occasion that he is in of sinning, is involuntary, though proximate, as he came to relinquish it without prejudice to his honour; and, worldling as he is, they leave it in his breast to determine whether his honour be engaged, and sufficiently to countervail that of God. They are desirous that he should remain in this occasion, or that at least they should not be under a necessity of obliging him to quit it, as he cannot, it is supposed, quit it without spiritual detriment to himself; and they refer to himself, and to his own judgment, or rather to his passion and to his self-love, what is best to be done in it. They collect together, for fear of disheartening him, whatever opinions of moral divines seem to favour his case: that is, they authorize his error, they foment his libertinism, they bring him to damnation, and damn themselves with him. For I now come back to my first proposition. In vain do we expect the grace of resistance, to overcome temptation, when temptation is voluntary, and it depends on ourselves to avoid it by flight. In vain shall we have this grace of resistance, in involuntary temptations, if we be not ourselves disposed to resist them, especially in imitation of Christ our Lord, by mortifying the flesh, as I am going to make appear in the second part.

Part II. In order to understand my second proposition, be pleased to presuppose that necessary principle, on which, as I may say, is hinged the whole mystery of man's predestination, and which at the opening of this discourse I have already developed in some measure; but which will appear more nobly conceived, and more strongly expressed, in these remarkable words of St. Cyprian: "The virtue of the holy Spirit is not imparted to us by our own choice, but by the divine appointment." That is, the grace of God is not given us according to our own choice, much less according to our fancy, or inclination, but by a certain rule, which God hath established, and which, if we swerve from it, will be useless and ineffectual. From this principle I shall draw three consequences; consequences extended almost to infinitude, through

our moral obligations, and which, being applied to our conduct in life, are the means to be observed in the several duties we are bound to fulfil, in order to answer the will of God, toward effecting that important work, salvation. I beseech you be attentive to the material doctrines I am going to deliver.

The first consequence: in the temptations and dangers to which we are exposed, through the weakness of human nature, God Almighty, whose fidelity is never wanting, is always ready to assist us with his grace; but he requires that we use it conformably to the state to which he hath called us, and to the end for which it was bestowed upon us. For, this is directly what St. Cyprian meant, when he said, that it "was not given us by our own choice, but by the divine appointment." Now you know, beloved hearers, that in quality of Christians, we all make profession of being soldiers of Christ; and among us there is not a single person, who is not impressed with that sacred character. Whence it follows, that our whole life, as the scripture witnesses, must be a continual war of the spirit against the flesh, of reason against the passions, of the interior man against the exterior man; in short, of ourselves, against ourselves. And if we truly aspire to the glory of Christianity, which consists only of solid virtues, St. Paul, who was raised up by God to teach it to us, and give us of it a just and adequate idea, seems constantly to conceive it under a military form. For, using a metaphor, which we should hold in veneration, as the Holy Ghost himself is the author of it, he mentions the buckler of faith, the breastplate of justice, the helmet of hope; and in a thousand places of his divine epistles, he encourages us to put on this spiritual armour of God, and makes us understand, that we are bound to make use of it, and that without it, whatever we possess which is good, or we presume is good in us, is an airy phantom, a mere illusion. In this situation we all of us are.

What doth God on his part do? He applies his holy grace to us; grace proportioned to this situation. We have a difficult and dangerous war to carry on: he gives us his grace, not such as he gave to the first man, for that would be unsuitable; but the grace of conflict, of defence, of attack, of resistance; forasmuch as none but such are suitable. Temptations are the assaults which the enemy makes upon us, and grace is the means by which he is repulsed. Consequently, to put trust and confidence in grace, and not be determined to resist and to fight, is to forget what we are,

to entertain chimerical notions of grace, and to render the views of God abortive. This, however, is a common practice; and may heaven grant that it may be not ours! We are desirous of graces that may guard us against dangers of every kind; but we would have them be such as would cost us nothing, as would give us no trouble, as would leave us in possession of a peaceable, quiet, agreeable life. But God will have his graces be such as shall stir us up, and press us on to action, and shall oblige us to persist in subjection to a labourious and uninterrupted application; for "the virtue of the Holy Spirit is not imparted to us by our own choice, but by the divine appointment." By many well-meaning, virtuous persons, seduced by self-love, a quiet life is wished for and sought, even from pious motives. But I (says Jesus Christ) disavow this sluggishness, because nothing is more opposite to the spirit of my gospel, and because it is by violence that my kingdom is borne away. It was with this view that I entered, as your leader, the field of battle: "For I came not to send peace, but the sword." Matt. x. This is an obvious and convincing testimony, that he requires his followers should be courageous souls, indefatigable men, and always in a condition to gain fresh victories. Peace and tranquillity are peculiar to heaven: on earth, our portion is war and disturbance: "I came not to send peace, but the sword."

The second consequence: the first maxim in war is, to harrass, as much as possible, and weaken the enemy. This stands to reason, as moderation and indulgence would lead, inevitably, to ruin and destruction. Now, Christians, which is the enemy, the most powerful enemy that grace hath to combat with? Let us not deceive ourselves, but humbly acknowledge it in the presence of God: it is our flesh, that flesh of sin; that flesh which only conceives criminal desires; that flesh, a slave to libidinous affections; that flesh uninterruptedly an enemy to God. This is the enemy (according to the apostle) the most to be apprehended, the enemy by which we are mostly tempted; for "each one is tempted by his own concupiscence;" (James i.;) a dangerous enemy, which is always within us, and is interwoven with our nature; a dreadful enemy, which we naturally love; a soothing enemy, which gains upon us imperceptibly, and by insinuation. This enemy (says St. Chrysostom) must be brought under subjection, must be utterly subdued by Christian mortification, if we expect that grace shall overcome temptation.

For I say that a Christian, who is a stranger to this kind of mortification; who pampers his flesh in ease and effeminacy; who is all for pleasure, and indulges in all the conveniencies of life; who holds intelligence, and acts in concert with corrupt nature, and on all occasions gratifies inclination, and relies, notwithstanding, on the grace of God, as if that alone were sufficient for salvation, knows neither what grace is, nor the first principles of the religion he professes. This St. Bernard proves in the following manner: the chief effect, which ought to uphold him, and secure his salvation, is to extinguish concupiscence by means of mortification. You, on the contrary, beloved hearer, you, a sensual and delicate Christian, strengthen it instead of weakening it, and become its abettor, instead of retrenching what gives it the advantage in its attacks upon you. That is, instead of aiding grace against the temptation, you are aiding to the temptation in opposition to grace, and frustrate by the one the influence of the other. Never ought you, therefore, to expect that grace will have the desired effect, unless you would ask contradictory things, namely: that grace and concupiscence may rule you by turns; or, that God Almighty, by an extraordinary miracle, would create new graces, which, without subduing the flesh, would make the spirit prevail. But mistake not the case, and be constantly mindful, that the graces of God are never dispensed according to the will and liking of man, but according to the wise and invariable disposition of divine Providence; for "the virtue of the holy Spirit is not imparted to us by our own choice, but by the divine appointment."

And, indeed, how did the saints encounter temptation? What stratagem did they use, what means did they employ in opposition to it? Did not holy David, in the midst of the pomp and pleasures of a court, gird his loins with hair-cloth, when his thoughts disturbed him, and the rebellion of his heart impelled him to evil? "As for me, (says he,) when they were troublesome to me, I was clothed with hair-cloth." Ps. xxxiv. Was it not this that induced St. Paul to treat his body with so much rigour? "I chastise my body, (says he,) and bring it under subjection." 1 Cor. ix. How then! Is the grace we receive of a different nature from what was conferred on that great apostle? Are we endued with more fervour, or is our flesh reduced to greater subjection, than was that of the man after God's own heart? Are we assailed by the enemy

in a different manner from so many religious, and so many solitaries, the chosen servants and friends of God? Not one among them durst trust to grace, without mortifying the senses; and we, without mortifying or controlling the senses; what do I say? in the downy lap of ease and convenience, nay, softness and voluptuousness, are so strangely presumptuous, as to hope for the influence of God's grace. St. Jerom, however loaded with merits, thought himself, even with the assistance of grace, unable to resist, unless of his body he made a victim of penitence; and we, weak mortals, pretend to bear up against the charms of the world, and all the most violent efforts of hell, by making of our bodies idols of self-love. Hilarion and Anthony, those heavenly men, those angels upon earth, condemned themselves to watchings, abstinence, and all the rigours of a painful and austere life; because they well knew that it was the best, the only method of extinguishing the fire of concupiscence, and repressing its sallies; and we expect to deaden it by furnishing everything best adapted to give it life and activity. St. John the Baptist, who was sanctified in his mother's womb, and who might have said, that divine grace was born along with him, relied on it only inasmuch as he exercised it; or, to speak more correctly, inasmuch as he exercised himself by it and with it, in the constant practice of perfect abnegation; and we, conceived in sin, and living in sin, promise ourselves the grace of victory without fighting; or the grace of fighting without violence: the grace of sanctity without penitence, or the grace of penitence without austerity. But if that were the case, (concludes St. Jerom,) the life and deeds of that godlike precursor, and of all those who have walked in his footsteps, far from deserving admiration and praise, might justly be looked upon as delusion and folly.

Thus reasoned the fathers, who were given us as teachers by the divine Providence, and ought to be our guides in the way of salvation. Be not, therefore, surprised, that worldlings who walk (as the apostle speaks) according to the flesh, and are enemies to the cross and mortification of Jesus, are so easily overcome in the hour of temptation. Ask me not, whence comes it that they resist so seldom, that they yield so easily, that they rise with such difficulty? These are the consequences of their delicacy and sensuality; and if souls like these, who idolize their bodies, were not swayed by concupiscence, it would be the greatest of miracles in the order of grace. No, no; (says Tertullian, speaking to Chris-

tians who were persecuted in the primitive times of the Christian era;) I shall never believe that those whose flesh is nourished in pleasure, have the necessary qualifications to enter the lists with torments and death. Whatever ardour a Christian may show for the cause of God, and in defence of his faith, I shall always diffide in, or rather despair of, his willingness to exchange the delicacy of banquets, of sumptuous apparel, of gay equipages, of a numerous train, for the rigour of dungeons, of racks, of wheels, of scorpion-whips. A champion, in order to get strength for the fight, must previously abstain from sensual pleasures, and be constantly inured to toilsome occupations; for these are the means of acquiring strength. In like manner, the man who prepares for the engagement to which his religion calls him, must make trial of himself by mortification, which will put him in a condition to undergo everything, and be dismayed at nothing. Now what Tertullian said with regard to persecutions, which were the public and external temptations of Christianity, I, with equal reason, apply to the internal and particular temptations of all the faithful. It is God's grace that must overcome them. But in vain do we presume that grace, though all powerful, will put them to flight, if the flesh which they proceed from be not curbed and kept under. And whoever thinks otherwise is grossly mistaken, and goes astray.

But in what doth this mortification of the flesh consist? And to what is this exercise (according to the practice of the world) reduced? The third and last consequence. Ah! beloved hearers, give me leave to wave mentioning what this virtue is, according to the general practice of the world; a virtue scarce known in it, exposed to derision, and held in abhorrence. But whatever notions the world may have of it, the apostolic oracle still subsists, that to serve Jesus Christ, and preserve in his service an inviolable fidelity, we must crucify our flesh, and die to our passions and irregular desires, because "they that are Christ's, have crucified their flesh with their vices and lusts." Gal. v. It will always be true, (whatever may be the opinion of the world,) that among all mankind, there is no condition in which this crucifying of the flesh is not necessary, absolutely necessary, because all mankind are exposed to temptation. Whatever difficulty the world may have to join issue with me, the sole experience of its own irregularities sufficiently demonstrates, that the more exalted men's stations are, the more frequent ought to be the mortification of their senses, as temp-

tations in exalted stations are most general and most violent. Whatever thoughts the world may conceive of it, at least it must grant, that the more a sinner lies open to temptation, the more strictly and rigorously it is incumbent on him to observe this law of bodily chastisement. Were we, indeed, such Christians as we ought to be, these gospel rules, however general, would be more than sufficient to make us know our duty. But being overruled by self-love, and our self-indulgence being so excessive, scarce can we take up a settled resolution to inflict any voluntary pains on ourselves, though ever so slight. What then doth the church do? This general command she hath determined and reduced to a particular obligation, the Lenten fast. And in doing this, she is influenced by her knowledge of our weakness on one hand, and necessities on the other. She is regulated by the example of the ancient patriarchs, but much more by that of Christ our Lord. She is authorised by the power which God hath conferred on her, to promulgate laws for the conduct of her children; and she expects from our fidelity, that if we be desirous of mortifying the flesh, so much as is needful for the overcoming of temptation, not only shall we find that nothing is ordained by this precept too rigorous, but shall do more than is ordained, because what is ordained will be found insufficient, in a thousand emergencies, to bridle our affections, and extinguish the fire of our unruly passions.

Such, beloved Christians, was the end which the church proposed in instituting this holy fast. But in course of time, what is come to pass? What we never can deplore with sufficient zeal, being a disorder that causes such glaring scandals. The devil and the flesh, perceiving themselves weakened by so salutary an observance, have exerted all their strength to procure its abolition. Heterodox teachers have impugned the commandment. Some have maintained, that the church, by imposing it, exceeded the limits of lawful power; as if Christ had not told her, when he made her the inheretrix and depository of his authority: "Whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven." Matt. vi. Others have acknowledged the power of the church, but denied her having legally enacted the law, or enforced an obligation of paying submission to it; as if tradition were not evident upon this head, and St. Augustin had not spoken twelve centuries ago, when he said that fast was at other times of counsel, but in Lent of precept. Even libertine Catholics, devoid of conscience, rise

up in opposition to a practice so usefully and so solidly established: not by starting difficulties against the law itself, or the power of legislation, but by showing a contempt for the one and the other; by violating the precept with scandalous impunity; by not even seeking some sort of pretext to give colour to their disobedience, and to save appearances. What do I say? Shall those be deemed members of the church of Christ, and be called by a name of which they are not worthy, which they infamously dishonour, the name of Catholic, whereas our blessed Saviour will have us look upon them as pagans and idolators: "He that will not hear the church, let him be unto thee as the heathen and the publican." Matt. xviii.

But even among the faithful, of that small number who respect the church, and are seemingly submissive to her orders and decisions, how many elude the rigour of the precept by false interpretations which they give it in favour of corrupt nature? By supposed reasons, which they ascribe to necessity, but which flow from effeminacy? By unavailing dispensations which their superiors grant them, or which they grant themselves? I say unavailing dispensations; and to give you a proof of it, mark what I advance: you need but consider three great irregularities which have crept insensibly into these dispensations, and relatively to which I would fain bring you over to my way of thinking. For, in the first place, they seem commonly annexed, not to persons themselves, but to states adhered to. And, indeed, Christians, is it not surprising, that now-a-days a man is no sooner possessed of an ample fortune, and raised to an honourable and dignified rank, than he lays aside all thoughts of complying with the precept which enjoins him to fast? That then his imagination is fertile in excuses to plead exemption? That then his strength fails him, that his constitution, his health, will no longer suffer him to do what he might, and would cheerfully have done in an humble state, in a religious house, in a more regular and more Christian-like course of life? In the second place, those who think themselves exempt from the law of fasting, are those who the most easily might comply with it, your rich ones of the age, who abound in everything, and enjoy all the comforts and conveniencies of life. I say more: and in the third place, those who lay the greatest stress on an imaginary weakness, in order to evade the obligation of fasting, are such as ought to use the greatest violence in order to comply with it, because it is for them that it is most necessary.

For, who are they? Sinners, who are not only responsible to God for the satisfaction due for a thousand crimes heretofore committed, but are fettered also by the inveterate habits, that render them liable, for the time to come, to frequent relapses, which they are bound to guard against. Worldlings, taken up with their lawful professions, and incidental occupations; with a thousand affairs that set before their eyes, without intermission, a thousand objects, which for them are so many unavoidable temptations. Courtiers, whom the hurry and agitation of the court, whom its customs and maxims, its intrigues and solicitudes, its effeminacy, its pleasures, its pomp and parade, expose to the most dangerous occasions of sinning. Young persons, women surrounded by numberless adorers, who flatter them, who idolize them, who lavishly praise them, who say endearing things to them, who wait on them assiduously: that is, who mean to dishonour them by laying snares in their way, in which, alas! they are too easily and too frequently taken. Fast for these is particularly obligatory; and yet these are they who particularly pretend to plead exemption from it. They consign it over to monasteries and cloisters. But (answers St. Bernard) if in cloisters and monasteries the precept of fasting be better observed, it is no just consequence, that therefore in them there is most occasion for it. The reason of it is, that by retirement, and by all the exercises of a religious profession, the dwellers in them are more screened from danger.

Ah! dear Christians, remember that you never can surmount the temptation, while you obey the flesh and its sinful appetites. Remember that, in the law, God makes no distinction of quality or rank; or if he doth, that it is not with regard to you or your state, to relax the precept, but to make it, on the contrary, more confined and rigorous. Remember that you are Christians, as well as others, and that the higher you are raised, the more rocks you have to avoid, and the more enemies to engage with. By consequence, that the more affluent and grand your situation is, the more you ought to dread the loss of your souls, and make the stronger efforts for their safety and preservation. Besides the practice of fasting and penitence, be assiduous in hearing the word of God, and in performing good works: in hearing the word of God, as the ministers of Christ, at this holy time, dispense with most zeal this holy word, which should enlighten and strengthen you; in performing good works, as the church of God, at this holy time,

redoubles all her fervour, and endeavours to awaken all the fervour of the faithful. Provided with these arms, you will stand secure. Nothwithstanding the artfulness and subtilty of temptation, notwithstanding its frequent returns and importunity, notwithstanding all its strength, and most violent assaults, you will hold out steadily in the ways of God, and obtain the reward of everlasting glory.

SERMON XVIII.

ON RELAPSE INTO SIN.

For the Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost.

"*Jesus seeing their faith, said to the man sick of the palsy: Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee.*" MATT. ix.

THERE is no evil so great, beloved hearers, none so pernicious to mankind, as sin. And if Jesus did a favour to this poor man sick of the palsy, by conferring his health of body on him, and curing his disorder, he did him still a greater, and a thousand times more estimable, by giving health to his soul, and granting him the remission of his sins. Alike is the advantage which we reap, ourselves, from the sacrament of penance. To no purpose had this paralytic man recovered, by the interposition of the divine agency, the use of his limbs, and had heard from the mouth of our Saviour himself that all-powerful word, "Arise and walk," (Matt. ix.,) if, so soon as he was cured, he had lost all motion, and had relapsed again into his former infirmity. To keep within the verge of my subject: to no purpose his sins had been pardoned, if passion, resuming her dominion over him, had plunged him directly into the same habits; and to no purpose he had been reconciled to God, if, at the expiration of a few weeks, he had returned again to his criminal practices, and had become a greater enemy than ever to his heavenly benefactor. Upon this account it was, that our blessed Saviour, after having cured that other palsied man at the pool, of whom mention is made in St. John's

gospel, admonishes him expressly to sin no more, and to beware of falling back into his past ill conduct, lest he should draw down upon himself a chastisement from heaven more rigorous than that which he hath hitherto experienced: "Behold thou art made whole: sin no more, lest some worse thing happen to thee." John v.

Give me leave, therefore, beloved hearers, to speak, this day, upon the same topic. And as the Council of Trent, among the various characteristics of true repentance, repentance by which our sins are forgiven, points out and specifies the stedfastness and perseverance of the penitent sinner, give me leave to handle, for your present instruction, an interesting subject, which I have not touched upon as yet in the pulpit; a subject, which calls upon me for all my zeal, and upon you for all your attention: it is relapse into sin. I mean to let you see what notions we ought to conceive of conversions, followed by ordinary and habitual relapses. It is a dreadful subject: and if it be true (as St. Augustin affirms) that we should not rejoice, or hear God's grace mentioned, without having our hearts at the same time filled with a salutary fear, according to the prophet: "Rejoice unto the Lord with trembling;" (Ps. ii.;) with how much greater reason should we tremble at hearing the doleful lot of numbers of our fellow Christians, which I am going to lay before you in this discourse?

There are divers states, according to divines, both of sin and of grace; but of all these states, there are two the most common in the present life. One is, to recover from a lapse into sin by the sacrament of penance; the other, to forfeit the grace conferred by a relapse into sin. Now the former (says St. Gregory) constitutes the happiness of man upon earth, and gives him communication with all the other states of holiness. For, the sacrament of penance restores us to the state of grace, and puts it in our power never more to sin; it re-establisheth us in the greatest privileges of grace, as if we had never committed sin; it serves us in lieu of a confirmed grace, to preserve us from falling into sin; and it enables us to merit the state of glory, wherein it is impossible we should ever sin. Hence it follows, by a contrary argument, that the latter state, which is that of relapse, must be for man the greatest of all misfortunes, as all those advantages of penance are destroyed by it, which again are reducible to two in particular: namely, with regard to the past, to blot out sins com-

mitted, and with regard to the future, to corroborate our resolution of never more sinning. Observe, therefore, two propositions which I advance.

First: ordinary and habitual relapse into sin renders past penitence extremely suspicious.

Secondly: renders future penitence not only difficult, but according to the language of the scripture and fathers, morally impossible.

What then doth the relapsing sinner do? Two things. He gives room to doubt that his past penitence was not sincere, and throws himself into a difficulty, an extreme difficulty, or rather an impossibility, of ever returning by a fresh and effectual penitence to God. So that he cannot reasonably rely on the past, and is equally embarrassed with regard to the future. In a word, relapse into sin is a strong presumption of false penitence concerning the past, and a great obstacle to true penitence for the time to come. This I shall evince, if you will but attentively give ear to the arguments which I shall adduce in support of my assertion.

Part I. Notwithstanding the rigorous exactness of the law, which true penitence, when we are going to renounce sin, requires; far be it from me, beloved Christians, absolutely and universally to condemn the penitence, however doubtful, of a sinner who feels in his own heart a consciousness that he proceeds, or that he hath proceeded, with candour and uprightness. To pass such a judgment is the province of God, and of God only. As the ministers (says St. Augustin) of the Son of God have it not in their power to give sinners whom they reconcile, and whose consciences they absolve, an entire assurance; so they cannot deprive them, when reconciled and absolved, of a firm confidence, whether well or ill founded, that their sins are remitted, and their penitence found grace in the presence of God. For, the priest, notwithstanding he is God's vicegerent, and is empowered to dispense the sacrament of penance, cannot answer for certainty for the dispensation thereof being valid or null. None but God knows whether or not our penitence have all the requisites for making it just and receivable, as, next to God, none but ourselves can be certain that it wants them. And the reason of this difference is, that to know if penance be perfect and effectual, we can judge of it only from two principles, which are, the grace of God and the will of man. Now both

together are known to God only. Whereas to know that it is defective and void, it suffices that the sinner be convinced of his own indisposedness and guilt. But no one hath a right, besides God and the sinner, to conclude positively, that a man's penitence, whatever appearance it may wear of unworthiness, is void and ineffectual, because no one can prove it evidently and incontestably. True, dear Christians: but in default of evidence, there may be conjectures; and these conjectures may be so strong and cogent, as to give room for a reasonable and well-grounded presumption; and this presumption may be such as to authorise the judgment which the priest, the minister of God, passes upon the penitence of certain sinners, deeming it suspicious, and rejecting it as such, when his duty obliges him to take cognizance of it. For, this, agreeably to the spirit and laws of church discipline, is daily put in practice. Now of all the conjectures which can, and which should raise doubts concerning the penitence of a sinner, that which appears to be the least equivocal, and by which I abide, as the most convincing, and, at the same time, the most plain and obvious, is a speedy relapse which usually follows the penitence of a certain kind of men; and this I prove, beloved hearers, by a plain demonstration, and thus I argue the case with yourselves.

You have performed, you say—I speak to a sinner of that class, of which St. James conceived him to be, whose heart being divided between God and the world, is inconstant in his ways, that is, in his penitence and conversion: "A double-minded man, inconstant in his ways;" (James i.;) you have performed those duties, to perform which your religion obliges you, and the minister of the Lord, relying on the firmness of your inward disposition, says to you, as our blessed Saviour said to the penitent Magdalen, thy sins are forgiven thee: go in peace. On this is founded the deceitful tranquillity which possesses your mind, and which heaven forbid I should now indiscreetly set about to disturb. But be pleased to observe what the ground of it ought to be, and the means by which such ground is ascertained.

If your penitence be really such as you suppose it, two things have passed between God and you; I say two things, things inseparable from the sacrament of penance: one, on your part, having engaged yourself to God by a sincere protestation of never more relapsing, which lost you his favour; the other, on God's part, having reciprocally engaged himself to you, and promised to

afford you the assistance of his grace, in order to strengthen you against future relapses. This is the declaration of the Council of Trent. For we learn from the very principles of faith, that all sacraments which operate without let, besides their virtue of sanctifying souls, communicate likewise special graces toward obtaining the end peculiar to them. Now there is no end more peculiar to the sacrament of penance, than the preserving of man from a relapse into sin. It remains, therefore, to be known, whether, when a Christian, without any visible amendment in life, relapses easily, speedily, and frequently, into the same transgressions, we may reasonably suppose, that he hath received from above those peculiar graces, and that he hath a sincere desire and efficacious will to renounce his sin. Now I hold it, that neither the one nor the other carries with it the least appearance of probability. And as the resolution to persevere, and to relase no more, is one of the most essential parts of the sacrament; and the increase of spiritual aid, to which the justified soul acquires a kind of right, is the principal fruit of it: seeing no sign of these in a sinner subject to speedy and frequent relapses, I have cause to apprehend, that his presence was void of the qualities requisite to justify him in the presence of Almighty God.

This is the proof, this the foundation of my first proposition. Give me leave to enlarge upon it. I shall not here speak of the auxiliary graces, which, in consequence of the sacrament, Almighty God would, beyond all doubt, confer upon man, if man would but put himself, by being converted, in a condition to receive them. This, it is true, would evince more strongly the truth of my assertion, but would not, perhaps, be so affecting an argument, or make so deep and lasting an impression. Let us then dwell solely upon the sinner's will, which divines allow to be the very substance and groundwork of penance.

In truth, beloved hearers, is it credible that a man shall have a determined, fixed, and absolute will to renounce sin, and that presently afterwards, a sinful object being presented to his mind, he shall shamefully yield to, and, without resistance, sink under the temptation? Ah! (says St. Bernard,) nothing is more forcible than the human will, when consistent with itself. Every thing submits to it, every thing obeys it. There is no difficulty which it doth not remove, no opposition which it doth not surmount; and that which otherwise would appear impossible,

becomes feasible and easily, when undertaken cordially. Now this is undeniable, in a particular manner, with regard to sin: for, whatever corruption is inherent in our nature, we sin not, after all, but because we have the will to commit sin; and if the will be wanting, it is undoubtedly true, that we do not commit sin. So that our will, in this respect, preserves a kind of sovereignty over itself, and participates, in some measure, of the divine omnipotence, as in what regards sin, it absolutely acts by free choice, and, in order not to sin, hath in its own option to reject or admit. I have, therefore, all the reason imaginable to think, that the will would not resist and renounce sin, because I see plainly, by what follows, that it no way resists, nor renounces sin at all. It is St. Bernard's argument, an argument incompatible with the principles of Pelagianism, as it supposes the influence of the grace of Christ Jesus, and is easily reconciled with what St. Paul said, when he complained, that "the evil which he would not, that he did," (Rom. vii.) because by that he understood the involuntary motions of his heart; whereas St. Bernard's discourse relates to the free consent which is given to sin.

In like manner, Tertullian observes, that when we are apt to put the thing in execution, which, at our conversion, we promised to God, it is a mistake to say, I was willing to do it, but I did not: for, says this great man, either you were willing but by halves, and this half was insufficient for penance; or you were thoroughly and efficaciously willing; and then it was natural you should put it into execution. And, indeed, (adds he,) if your will was good, how comes it that it should be so very effectual, on all occasions, and that it should be, on this, of none effect? How comes it that at the sight of a relapse so mortal as that which you had undoubted reason to apprehend, you made no effort, nor gained any victory? How comes it that you fled not from the approaching danger? How comes it that you broke not off that company, that conversation, that diversion, which you knew to be for you an immediate occasion of recidivation? Nothing, however, have you done of all this; and the very first time that the enemy of man laid a bait in your way, after some slight unavailing remorses which your conscience stifled, you followed its captive charm and allurement; and, notwithstanding all this, you would have me believe, that you had the sincere and true purpose of amending your life, which is requisite to penance. But, for the

the credit of penance, and for the interests of God and of his holy grace, I had rather presume, that you had imposed upon and wanted a right knowledge of yourself. It is Tertullian's conclusion, a conclusion, in my mind, extremely just, and no less solid.

Against this, Christians, three things may be urged, to which it is of the utmost importance that I answer, as the removing of so many mistaken notions will serve to confirm you in the doctrine I preach. Some will say: may it not so happen, that, without lying to the divine Spirit, I may be inconstant and frail, and my will, having had, at the moment it followed the attractive of grace, whatever was necessary for a perfect conversion, might have been so perverted, as to commit the sin it not long before sincerely detested? Yes, I own with St. Thomas, that it is possible, and may come to pass. But at the same time I say, that when relapses are sudden and frequent, it is impossible that the change should be of that nature. The reason is this, and beyond reply: because your conduct, in all other respects, how weak soever you may suppose yourself, cannot be charged with the like unaccountable inconstancy and levity. On the contrary, as often as in other matters you have taken a resolution (if your interest be ever so little concerned) you stedfastly adhere to, and pursue it with ardour. If, in the undertaking, your honour is concerned, or the advancement of your fortune depends thereon, you know not what it is to desist from the pursuit; neither do we perceive that woful fatality to slacken in the accomplishment of whatever excites your ambition or avarice. How can you expect, that in the one only point which regards penance, we should suppose you unsteady, and subject to change? Or that we should harbour so injurious a notion of you, as to imagine that your conduct, in regard to every worldly interest, is of a piece and uniform; and that those vicissitudes in your mental faculties are perceived only where it is incumbent on you to be faithful to God? Had you not better say, that there was no unsteadiness, and that you suffered no change? That your will was always the same, always inefficacious concerning good, always secretly attached to evil, and by a necessary consequence, always fruitless and unprofitable for penance? This is my sentiment concerning the matter; and (do yourself justice) it is hard it should not be yours too. And what makes me more strongly of this opinion, is, that you frequently relapse without any pretext or colour. I mean, that the

occasions which you met with of sinning were not more dangerous, and that the temptations into which you fell were not more violent. Now is it not natural to suppose a change in the circumstance of the will, while its object remains in the same situation, especially in regard to a serious, prudent, enlightened will, such as yours must have been, if your penitence had had the characteristic marks which, for the remission of sin, and the justification of the sinner, God requires.

Another difficulty. We are weak; and that will, though certainly sincere, (which true penitence always includes,) is attacked by those powerful enemies—our passions. I know it, Christians; and I can agree with you relatively to the violence of the attack. But I know, likewise, that one of the artifices of our self-love is, to suppose that these enemies are much more powerful than they are in reality, in order to enable us to yield the victory with less reproach of our own conscience. Or rather, I know that one effect of the great depravity of our will is, to hold intelligence with these supposed enemies, because, at bottom, we deem them not enemies, but are really willing to be overcome by them. This (says St. Jerom) is the inordinate manner in which we proceed. Far from being abashed at our own weakness, we take the advantage of it against God himself: that is, far from being mortified at it, we use it as a varnish to frivolous excuses, which we allege for our sins; and what is pusillanimity, malignity, and unfaithfulness, we falsely and chimerically attribute to necessity. And what St. Jerom says of Christians in general, that Tertullian reproaches himself withal. We are clothed (says he) with a terrestrial flesh, an animal flesh, that impels us to sin; but we are made amends by the dignity of our soul, which is spiritual and celestial, and which lifts up to God. Why, therefore, are we perpetually alleging our frailty, without ever considering the force and efficacy of nature and grace, of reason and law, of conscience and religion, which we have always at command? But granting that those passions, the impetuosity of whose sallies it is incumbent on us to resist and repel, are as dreadful enemies as we can suppose them; yet I know, furthermore, that if the promise we made, of invariably persevering in obedience to the law, had been real and sincere, it would have been more forcible than those supposed enemies; and its most essential property was, to be able to surmount them; and that if it had not this virtue of itself, it is a very natural consequence,

that, therefore, our penitence was false. Now who shall persuade me that it had this virtue, while there is no appearance of it; and I see a sinner, after his penitence, as much a slave to his passions, as irregular in his life, as licentious in his words, as froward in his actions, as he was before? For, to lay before you the whole matter, the purpose of amendment is not one of those mere unavailing desires, which we read of in scripture, and which the soul conceives, but wants strength to bring forth. It is a supernatural will, in so superior a degree to all other wills of which man is capable, that no other can be put in comparison with it. A will, which must have Almighty God for its object; which must make us sovereignly detest sin, and to which the smallest inducement is the fear and horror of eternal justice—that justice so terrible to the enemies of God! These are its qualities—qualities, (as we learn from the dictates of faith,) without which, penance is not only imperfect, but absolutely null. Now can our purpose be supposed to have had all these qualities, when (contrary to the agreement which, at our return to him, we made with God, contracting an obligation of persisting steadfastly in the state of grace) we suddenly abandon him, and the sight of a prostitute makes us wholly forgetful of our strongest resolutions and most indispensable obligations.

Give me leave, Christians, to judge of you by yourselves; and to show you, as clear as the meridian sun, the most evident of all truths: let us see how you behave in matters of much inferior consequence, in which no doubt can be had concerning the efficacy of your will. Just recovered from a dangerous illness, you fear a relapse; and what do you do in order to prevent it? You restrain your palate, you refrain from dainties, you pay obedience to the doctor who attends you, and submission to the regimen which he prescribes. You are scrupulously nice, you are exact to superstition. You fast, you mortify yourselves. You spend the time in silence and retirement. Whatever is most agreeable in life you forego. Company, diversions, assemblies, plays, all are held at naught, because your health, which you would wish to recover, is much more dear to you than all those; and, cost what it will, you are resolved to preserve it. To tell you it is a shame that you do so much less in order to avoid a relapse into sin, which brings death to your soul, would be to tell you what you have been told a thousand times. But I will tell you more; and an admirable

principle of religion it is. If your purpose of avoiding a relapse into sin is not more efficacious than your natural desire of preserving your health, (I do not say more lively or feeling, but more solid and strong,) it is an article of faith, that your penitence is invalid. And why? Ah! beloved hearers, give ear to this: because it is an article of faith, that the purpose of amendment which penance includes, must exceed all the fears, and all the desires with which the will is naturally affected. And, if in our heart there were one fear, or one desire, that should surpass, or equal this purpose of amendment, it would no longer be that purpose which salutary penance always includes, and which alone can effect the sinner's salvation. This is a doctrinal point of consequence; and the reason given for it by the fathers is, that the sorrow which justifies us should make us hate sin as thoroughly as we love and fear God. Now to satisfy in rigour the obligation of the law, it is not sufficient to love and fear God; we must love and fear him sovereignly, that is, above all things. So likewise, to fill up the measure of contrition, it is not sufficient to detest sin; we must detest it above all evils whatever; and if the detestation we conceive of it be not in that degree, in vain do we expect that God will approve of, or be pleased with our penitence. Now, according to this, beloved Christians, you whose penitence was followed by inconstancy, dare you say, that at the moment you confessed to God the violation of this law, you were more determined never more to violate it, than you would be at this time to guard against a malady that might cause your death? And if, from the knowledge which you have of yourselves, you dare not presume to bear this testimony, can I hope that your penitence found grace before God? I shudder at the very thoughts of your condition!

You say that the passion by which you are swayed, and which leads you into sin, assaults you more violently than all those together which oppose your desire of preserving your life. In that, Christians, we greatly deceive ourselves; it is a gross mistake. For, to show you that it is not the spring of your relapses, it is evident to me, that influenced only by human motives, and therefore inferior to those of penitence, you would renounce this passion, and be masters of it. In reality, suppose any one sin, the habit of which seems most insurmountable, and I will undertake to produce a hundred motives of interest or honour that would induce you to

surmount it. For instance, beloved hearers, if you were sure that a relapse into this sin would be the ruin of your fortune, would occasion the loss of your prince's favour, and would put you past all hopes of evermore recovering your former condition: if you, woman of the world, were convinced that the irregularity of your conduct would become public, and that you would be made to undergo the shame and ignominy attending it; that he from whose knowledge you so artfully concealed it, would find a clue that would lead him, unobserved, to the iniquitous scene, and that you would be exposed to all the rage of a jealous mind, and to the frantic raptures of a heart inflamed with the spirit of revenge, how frail and weak soever you may be, there would need no more to check you, and restrain you within the bounds of duty. This motive, therefore, would effectually stop the course of your passion. Yet you say, that notwithstanding the motive to penitence, you are unable to curb it. But what inference am I to draw from thence? Ought I to infer that the motive to penitence is not, of itself, so powerful as that of worldly consideration? No; for that would be an error injurious to God. I ought to infer, that in all probability, you were not affected by the motive to penitence, and that it had no share in actuating your heart: I mean, that you did not detest sin upon account of God, sovereignly, and above all things to be loved and to be feared; and by consequence, that your penitence should come under the same predicament with those which God rejects. This is my inference, an inference conformable to the most indubitable and incontestable maxims of religion.

The third, and last objection that I am to speak to. Those sinners who are subject to relapses, humble themselves before God, are moved at their own wretchedness, form acts of sorrow, are racked with anguish, bemoan their condition, and pour forth abundant floods of tears. Now what are all these but so many acts of true contrition? A false principle, replies the learned Chancellor Gerson, treating of this subject. All these are not what we call acts of true contrition. What then? The grace, and if you will have it so, the desire, but seldom the fruits and acts of penitence. For here we must distinguish four things: the grace of penitence, the desire of penitence, an act of penitence, and the fruits of penitence. The grace of penitence is the holy propensity, by which God incites us to relinquish sin. The desire of penitence is, as I may say, the first attempt which the heart makes to disentangle

itself from sin. An act of penitence is an effectual shaking off the manacles of sin. And the fruits of penitence are the deeds which we offer in satisfaction to our offended God for sin. A relapsing sinner may easily have the grace and desire of penitence; but it is hardly credible, that, so long as he persists in his inordinate ways, he hath an act and the fruits of it. My meaning is this: he had the grace of penitence at the time when he poured forth tears of sorrow; for that sorrow was an internal grace which God produced in him; but which, notwithstanding, destroyed not within him the will to sin. The reason is, that (as St. Gregory, pope, observes) the wicked are often unavailingly affected by the love of God, in the same manner that the righteous are innocently impelled by the force of temptation to evil; and as temptation, barely such, renders not the will of the righteous criminal; so the grace of penitence, barely such, confers not that holiness on the will of the wicked. The sinner is seduced into error by confounding the grace of penitence with the effect of penitence, and by attributing to himself what God doth for him, as if he had done it himself for God. A very pernicious blindness, says St. Bernard. By a kind of usurpation, we attribute to ourselves what God had wrought within us, taking his spiritual illuminations for our own contemplations, and his divine operations for our own co-operations.

Now this is the ordinary practice of sinners, slaves of concupiscence and of the evil spirit. And what is my proof of this assertion? None but that which I have borrowed from St. Gregory. For if I perceive (says this great pope) that a Christian is agitated by grievous temptations, but follows not the bent of his nature to evil, I may presume, in his favour, that he had but indeliberate feelings of them, and that his will was perfectly free from consent. And by the same rule, when I see a sinner, though sorely afflicted, and to all appearance racked with compunction, not the less frail, and addicted to relapses, I think myself sufficiently authorised to say, that if he had the affection, he had not the resolution, which is a necessary part of true penitence. Or if he had, it was one of those resolutions, of those good desires, with which hell abounds: one of those half wills, such as the devils have, who, devils as they are, detest sin, as the original cause of all their woes, although through their obstinacy they never quit it. Penitence of this nature, is like that of the Israelites, who, going over as inconsiderately from the worship of God to idolatry, as they returned to

the worship of God from idolatry, did (according to the scriptures) but provoke and irritate God the more. Protestations of this nature, are like those of Antiochus, to which the divine justice remains inflexible, and which cannot penetrate to the throne of mercy. Tears of this nature are like those of Esau, which, though accompanied with loud cries and roarings, are not accounted worthy the blessing of heaven. All this, I say, I will grant a sinner whose relapses are habitual, because in all this there is nothing repugnant to the notion I conceive of suspected penitence. If, on the contrary, it be suspected, it is because all this coalesces in it, and it joins relapses to the appearance of contrition, and confession in words to unfaithfulness in deeds. But to have full reliance on the penitence of a Christian whose disposition to relapse is such as I have described it, is what cannot be done but in contravention to all the precepts and rules of religion.

Thus Jesus Christ himself judged of it; and his example concerning the discernment of the heart, as in all other things, ought to be our model. Accordingly, St. John, in the second chapter of his gospel, tells us, that "many of the Jews believed in him, but he did not trust himself to them, for that he knew all men." John ii. These words deserved to be remarked. They believed in him, being excessively surprised at the change of water into wine, which he effected at the marriage-feast at Cana, and of which they had been witnesses; "but he did not trust himself to them," because he discovered in them but a superficial faith, suddenly stirred up at the sight of that prodigy; a faith, which would soon, by the malignant impressions of their wonted incredulity, be effaced from their minds. Thus it is that God acts by us, whenever we approach the tribunal of penance, only to resume, immediately after, our former habits and way of life. At that moment we lay open, or think we lay open, our soul to him. We are confident of him, and we answer for ourselves; and by these appearances of fervour and regret, we impose, oftentimes, on his very ministers. For (says Tertullian) it is easy to deceive them; and if the remission of sin had been as absolutely in their power, as the words which signify it, it would be constantly exposed to the artifices and deceits of false penitence. But what doth God do on such occasions? Seeing our inconstancy, that we will and will not renounce our sin; and knowing, by the light of his adorable prescience, that after a supposed return to him, we shall speedily fall

back into our evil practices, and be as strongly attached to the world as ever, he takes heed of his treasure, which is the grace of his sacrament, and suffers not that persons so unworthy as we, by a fraudulent penitence, have the benefit of receiving it.

Ah! Christians, how terrible it is for a man of the world, who is hurried into wickedness by the vehemence of his passions, but is not destitute of religious sentiments, to think that penance, which for others, after sin, is a motive of confidence, is, after relapse, a motive for him of dread and horror! That which should be for him a cause of tranquillity, infests his mind with deadly inquietudes; and he ought to be disturbed, not only at past sins, but at past contrition, and past penance. This is the instruction, beloved hearers, which the Holy Ghost would give us, when in Ecclesiasticus he gives this admonition: "Be not without fear about sins forgiven." Ecclus. v. We did not understand the mystical meaning of these words, which, seemingly, included a kind of contradiction. For if sin be forgiven, why should it still give us fear and apprehension? And if it be cause of fear and apprehension, for what reason should it be looked upon as pardoned? But now, O my God, I conceive what you would thereby intimate to us. You would show me that every kind of penitence is not sufficient security with you, and that which I deem forgiven, is oftentimes that which makes me more than ever a child of wrath; that I may be ruined by mortal sin of whatever kind; but that there is still a kind of penitence more capable of damning me than my very sin, inasmuch as it foments it, instead of curing it. Now it is clear beyond all doubt, that if there be any penitence of this kind, it is that which works no reformation of manners, nor preserves me from my unhappy relapses. But, O my Lord, where shall I place my confidence and security, if you forbid me to place them in my penitence? Have you taught me any other way but that? And have your scriptures, which I hold in place of oracles, directed me to betake myself to any other refuge? Such is the deplorable state of a sinner, abandoned to all the fluctuations of his heart, and instability of his desires; and whose motley life is a constant inconsistency, a perpetual alteration, and reciprocal succession of relapse and penitence.

I know this doctrine may disturb some consciences; and I would to God Almighty it may produce so happy and salutary an effect! For I speak to those sinners whom frequent relapses have confirmed

in iniquity. Now their only resource is, to be disturbed in mind by the word of God. Their undoing proceeds from the deceitful tranquillity which, sometimes, by the artifice of the deceitful spirit, they enjoy in their sin; and only such disturbance can awaken and rouse them from the fatal supineness and spiritual lethargy in which they are buried. Accordingly, far from being afraid to disturb them, my only fear is, that I shall not be able to disturb them at all, or at most, shall disturb them only by halves. And, as St. Paul heretofore "was glad, not because they [Corinthians] were made sorrowful, but because they were made sorrowful unto penance;" (2 Cor. vii.;) so should I bless God for having given uneasiness to so many sinners, because by such means, to the shadow would succeed the reality of penance. But this, perhaps, would drive them to despair. Alas! what harm to drive them to despair for a short time, in order to renew in them a never-ceasing hope! What danger in making them despair on their part, in order to make them hope on the part of God?

This way of speaking is borrowed from St. Gregory, and I do but deliver the thoughts of that father. Now, it was a maxim with him to raise pangs of despair in the minds of those, who, by continual relapses, were hardened in sin. No, no, beloved hearers, fear not being seized with that kind of despair: it must, in my mind, be of great utility. Be afflicted at so many false penitences, and rejoice in the Lord at the true penitence to which I exhort you. Since you first contracted a habit of sinning, perhaps you have made a hundred unworthy and sacrilegious confessions: be afflicted at all that. For, all that, far from corroborating your hope before God, will be the ruin and destruction of it. What then must be done? Ah! Christians, is anything more reasonable than what is required of you? We require of you that you act sincerely by God, in the manner you would have us act by you. If we had broken our word with you over and over, you would think it agreeable to the dictates of wisdom to disbelieve and reject the assurances we should give you, that we would act upon principles of strict honour; and can you expect, that the God of heaven will pay greater regard to your protestations? Is it allowable for you to be more religious towards men than him? You pique yourself on the accuracy of your dealings with men, and would be ashamed to be deficient in any particular; and shall there be an utter want of faithfulness in your dealings with God alone?

Wherefore, Christians, let us holily and profitably do that at last, which we have oftentimes done, perhaps fruitlessly, and to our condemnation. Let us imitate those holy penitents of the church, who all their life long adhered inviolably to their gracious God, after they had once recovered his grace. Let us keep to our resolutions, and by a steady perseverance let us ratify our penitence. Otherwise we shall have all imaginable reason to be apprehensive as well for future as for past penitence. For as relapse makes past penitence much to be suspected, it makes future penitence extremely difficult, and almost impossible, which is the subject of the second part.

Part II. When I consider the terms which the sacred penmen, speaking of the penitence which follows relapse into sin, make use of, I am not surprised, beloved Christians, that certain heretics, in former ages, should have been rigorous to an extreme, and should have set, on this head, no bounds or measure to the severity of this doctrine. Perhaps it may be said, that error was never better founded to appearance—(I say appearance)—on the authority of the word, than that of the novations, who, after baptism, absolutely and universally excluded all sinners from the grace of penitence. And when Tertullian, arguing from prejudice, would not allow it but once only, and without hope of return, he pretended to speak so conformably to the scripture, that he could not comprehend how any of the faithful should differ in opinion from him. And truly it should seem that nothing could be spoken in more express terms, than that which we read in St. Paul to the Hebrews: "It is impossible—[my brethren,]—(these are his words, which you have heard a thousand times, and of which I take upon me to lay now before you the precise meaning)—it is impossible for those who have been once illuminated, have tasted also the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, have moreover tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, and are fallen away, to be renewed again to penance, crucifying afresh to themselves the Son of God, and making him a mockery." In this manner, I say, St. Paul explained himself. What better pretext could those heretics desire for carrying into execution the design they had formed of abolishing the exercise and ministry of penance? The church hath condemned them, and we condemn them with her. St. Jerom and St. Augustin have interpreted

that passage as setting forth the impossibility of ever returning, when once it is lost, to baptismal grace; because baptism, which was called in those days the first penance, is one of those sacraments that cannot be reiterated. And this explanation, which I deem the most literal, takes off, if I may venture so to speak, all the hardness of the apostle's expression. St. Thomas of Aquin and Hugo of St. Victor took it more plainly, and understood it of that penance which we call the sacrament of reconciliation, endeavouring to reconcile the possibility of conversion for relapsing sinners with these excessively tremendous words, "It is impossible to be renewed again to penance."

Be that as it may, beloved Christians, the great rule we go by is, to keep within the limits which the Church had determined, by disallowing the pernicious tenet of Donatus. Now we know by the censure which she passed on that tenet, and our faith tells us, that God wills the life, not the death of the sinner; and he invites him, or rather commands and obliges him, to do penance again; and that, therefore, notwithstanding our relapses, penitence is still possible, and grace is ready for the fulfilling thereof. This is the decision of the Church of Christ. But there she stops, leaving to the words of the great apostle the whole extent and the whole force of which they are susceptible. And as the term impossible, in common language, is applicable to things that may absolutely be, but of which the execution is difficult, and attended with great obstacles, she hath always authorised the opinion of the fathers, who maintain that, especially for certain sinners, sinners subject to certain relapses, as you shall see presently, it is morally impossible, in some measure, that is, extremely difficult, to renounce their sin, and be converted to God. If we reason like Christians, should not this alone suffice to make us walk with fear and trembling in the slippery way to eternal salvation.

But let us endeavour, as much as possible, to investigate the matter, and penetrate into it; and in order to draw from it whatever fruit it is capable of producing, let each of us apply it to himself in particular. You ask me the reason why relapse into sin should render penitence so very difficult? And I, with St. Bernard, answer that it is, because it estranges the heart of God from us, because it adds strength to our natural bent and inclination to evil, because it enfeebles the virtue which grace hath infused into us, and because it essentially includes an opposition to the grace

which reconciles sinners to God. These four articles considered separately may stand in place of a demonstration.

1st. Yes, beloved hearers, the first misfortune which relapses bring on us is the alienating of God's affection from us, and the exhausting, in some sort, of his infinite mercy; which, infinite as it is in itself, is limited, notwithstanding, in regard to us, and to the distribution which it makes of those special graces and extraordinary succours, on which our conversion and amendment depend: "For three crimes of Damascus, and for four I will not convert it," (Amos i.,) says the Lord by his prophet. The three first crimes I have borne with and forgotten; but against the fourth shall my justice, my anger, and my vengeance act. As how? By my withdrawing myself from that ungodly people; a people, who, by their infidelity and wickedness have provoked and exasperated me. Now, beloved Christians, the moment that God withdraws himself from us, we must not be surprised that penitence becomes difficult, and that such difficulty increases proportionably as he withdraws himself from us. The reason is, that none but God, who by his divine presence fills the heart of man, and diffuses throughout it his divine Spirit, can facilitate penance, and give us a relish for it.

Of this can any more expressive figure be adduced than that of the man so famed in the Old Testament, the invincible Sampson? He had, it is true, been blinded by one particular passion; but his blindness was not carried, all at once, to that great degree, as to deprive him of the strength which God had so singularly and miraculously endowed him. The female foreigner, to whom he was affected, by a monstrous perfidy, had frequently attempted, by binding his limbs, to put him into the bands of his declared enemies; but he always found means to break his bands, and recover his liberty. Upon this he flattered himself, that though she should afterward play the same game over, he should never want might to disconcert her measures, and said, "I will go forth as I did before." Judges xvi. In short, this artful, wicked woman employs her wiles with such address, as to delude him, to overcome him, to cut off the seven locks in which lay concealed, by a secret mystery, his great strength. The news soon reached the ears of the Philistines. They surround him unawares, they fall upon him in great numbers. He endeavours to rise, "not knowing (adds the text) that the Lord was departed from him." Judges xvi.

This, beloved hearers, is the portrait of your soul, in that wretched state in which I conceive it; namely, in the state of relapse into sin. You say to yourself, rousing sometimes from the spiritual somnolency into which you are fallen, and reflecting on your wretchedness, I will quit this state, as I have already done: I will break my chains, I will make a vigorous effort, I will free myself from the passion which holds me in captivity: "I will go forth and shake myself." But do you not consider, that God retires from you; that proportionably as he retires, you are deprived of his aid; that penance of course becomes a heavy burden, an insupportable yoke; and that whereas heretofore it was a source of comfort to you, it now creates horror and disgust in your mind; for, your frequent relapses have made a wide separation, and almost insurmountable, between you and your God: "Not knowing that the Lord was departed from you." How often, Christians, have you learned by experience what I now advance.

2ndly. The will, however, is daily perverted; and the relapse which enfeebles it for what is good, gives it additional strength for what is evil. You know its progress: and in vain should I set about to enlarge upon it, and as it is by your melancholy experience that I know what it is. After the first sins begins the habit: the habit once contracted leads by little and little into blindness and obduracy. The vice takes root, and becomes, as it were, a second nature. This second nature is what St. Augustin denominates necessity. Of this necessity despair is the consequence, to which succeeds a moral impossibility of doing penance. For this is the notion St. Paul gives of it: "Who despairing have given themselves up to lasciviousness;" (Ephes. iv.;) and he produced for example the sin of the flesh, because it is in it that relapse operates the most infallibly, and the most commonly, these detestable effects. At first, the Christian hated sin as a monster, because his reason was not as yet blinded, nor his will corrupted. But sin, by relapses, a progressive course, and a natural gradation, gains a total ascendant: he accustoms himself to it, he grows familiar with it, he commits it without scruple, he is passionately fond of it, he despairs of conquering it, he abandons himself to it without restraint: "Who despairing having given themselves up to lasciviousness." But whence (says St. Chrysostom) proceeds their despair? From God and from themselves (replies the holy doctor). From God, because, being a God of sanctity, he cannot approve of what is

evil; and from themselves, because they have frequently experienced their own inconstancy and infidelity. From God and from themselves, because they perceive between God and themselves infinite contrarieties. And this is the origin of their despair. No, Christians: so far from that, it is an additional crime in the presence of God, as it is not, whilst in this life, allowable for the sinner to despair of God's mercy and unmeasurable goodness. But this despair, unreasonable as it is, is the chief effect of relapse into sin. The reason is, that hope, which is the basis and ground of penitence, being thereby shaken, the whole fabric of penitence is shaken, contrary to the intention of God himself; and this virtue, which ought to be a resource for the relapsing sinner, becomes a stumbling-block against which the despair of reforming his vicious life impels him: "Who despairing have given themselves up to lasciviousness."

3rdly. And to this, beloved hearers, that by frequent relapses we render the most powerful and efficacious remedies of no avail, and that the words of St. Paul seem perfectly accomplished, where he says, that when we voluntarily commit sin, after having received the knowledge of the faith (weigh well this circumstance) there is thenceforward no sacrifice for the expiation of our sins, and there only remains for us a dreadful expectation of God's judgments: "If we sin wilfully after having the knowledge of the truth, there is now left no sacrifice for sins." Heb. x. In fact, Christians, what would you say to a man who had cleansed himself a hundred times in the waters of penance, and as often plunged back into his former abominations? What would you say? And with all the ardour and spirit of zeal with which you should feel yourselves animated for him, which way you would set about moving his heart? Every argument has been used; whatever you can say, he hath already considered; the best examples have been set before his eyes. He is convinced of all, he hath hearkened attentively to all the remonstrances that were ever made him, he hath exhausted, in a manner, the virtue of the sacraments; and by his continual relapses he is not only accustomed, but hardened to all that; insomuch that God might say to him as he said heretofore to his people: "Thy bruise is incurable, thy wound is very grievous." Jer., xxx. Ah! sinner, what hast thou done, and to what an extremity art thou reduced! By opening thy wounds, thou hast made them incurable; and the unction of my grace, that powerful

remedy for the conversion of others, hath not wherewithal to effect thy cure.

4thly. But let us trace it higher, and let us avow, Christians, that the extreme difficulty of truly repenting, after having relapsed, arises from the very nature of relapse, which is, of itself, peculiarly repugnant to the grace of conversion. For, to the evilness of sin, relapse adds the qualities of ingratitude and contempt: ingratitude for the benefit, or first pardon, already obtained, and of contempt for the Majesty of an offended God. Two obstacles to a second reconciliation. Ingratitude for the benefit, which consists, (says Tertullian,) not only in our forgetfulness of God's past mercy, but in our turning it against him, to make it serve the purpose of sinning with impunity and greater audacity. And truly were we sure that the remission of sin which hath just been granted us, was the last of the graces which we had to hope for, and that the gates of mercy would forthwith be shut against us for ever and for ever, how prone soever we might be to passion, it were enough to restrain us, and keep us from relapsing. The very remedy, therefore, for penitence, is our inducement to licentiousness; and as Tertullian speaks, the excess of God's clemency foments and nourishes the rashness of man. That is, we are bad, because God is good; and, totally in opposition to the advancement of his cause, and the only means left for us to return to him, and to get, once more into the way of heaven, encourages us to indulge the irregularity of our passions. Now, beloved Christians, is it possible that God, being what he is, should not, as well for the merit of his grace, as the justification of his providence, have a special repugnance to be reconciled with us in that state?

Contempt for the Majesty and Sovereignty of God. For, not to lose sight of Tertullian's thought, what did the sinner by his first conversion, and by embracing penance? He overturned, in his heart, the dominion of Satan, that God might reign there. And what doth he by relapsing into evil courses? He expels God, to make way for the dominion of Satan in his heart. It looks as if a man, by his monstrous reciprocation of relapse and penitence, would make a comparison of the one with the other, and after trying both the one and the other, would give sentence against God in behalf of his enemy, and make free choice of him in preference to God. So that, (says Tertullian,) as his intention

by penitence was to satisfy God, now by a penitence directly contrary, a penitence in some shape of his very penitence, he spurns at God, and satisfies Satan. Now can anything make God more irreconcileable than such an outrage? Any relapse is liable to entangle us in this misfortune, but particularly that which makes us go so far as to quit God absolutely, to make his service disgustful to us, to make us refuse submission to the yoke of his law: I mean that kind of relapse, by which we fall not only into sin, but into an attachment of it. It is a kind of apostacy: and in this light it is that the learned Estius, with many of the fathers, meant to represent the words of St. Paul: "It is impossible to be renewed again by penance." He maintained that this, though but moral, impossibility of returning to God by means of penance, was not the effect of ordinary relapses, which happen through surprise, through weakness, through frailty, but those glaring, those unmanly, wilful, deliberate relapses, which prove of bad consequence to a man's state of life, and which, after edifying and public conversions, dishonour God's worship, and scandalize piety. This you know, Christians: and happy it is for you, if you have never found, by your own experience, how difficult and almost impossible a return to God is made by these inconstancies.

And now, Christians, let us close this discourse with a two-fold inference. One regards those who have constantly persisted in the state of grace, since their return to God; and the other is addressed to those sinners, who have deplorably relapsed into the way of iniquity, from which they had been rescued by the sacrament of penance. To the former we shall give the important advice, that the teacher of the Gentiles gave the Christians of Corinth: "He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall." 1 Cor. x. Take heed, my brethren, and let the misfortune of so many Christians, who have been ruined by relapses, and who are every day ruined, be a moving lesson, and a powerful motive to excite your vigilance? But what is the nature of this vigilance? To know yourselves thoroughly, and to be fully apprised of the dangers which surround you. To know your weaknesses, your inclinations, your passions; in a word, to diffide in your own strength: for, your greatest security is a diffidence in yourselves. To be fully apprised of the dangers which surround you, in order to avoid them; to shun the dangerous occasions of sin, to fly certain

company: for nothing can preserve you, with the divine grace, more effectually than flight. We shall stir up and strengthen the hopes of the latter; neither shall we, after using the strongest motives of intimidation, throw them into despondency. Wherefore, I exhort them, to make greater and more generous efforts than ever. Their conversion is difficult, but not absolutely impossible; or, if it be absolutely impossible to man, it is not so to God, nor to his holy grace. Because it is possible, and moreover necessary, it must be undertaken; and because it is difficult, it must be undertaken with a strong, a noble, and a generous resolution. Above all, I would advise both the one and the other to put themselves under a faithful, clear-sighted, disinterested director; to lay open their case to him, and follow his counsel; not to fear being known by him, but rather to fear that he know them not sufficiently. Thus shall they hold out in a penitential state, if they have returned to it; or, thus shall they return to it, if they have not held out. Penance will bring them in the way of salvation, and conduct them at length into the safe harbour of eternal happiness.

SERMON XIX.

ON DIVINE GRACE.

"*Jesus answered, and said to her: If thou didst but know the gift of God.*" JOHN iv.

THIS gift of God, beloved Christians, to which the Samaritan woman here spoken of by St. John was an entire stranger, and which the Saviour of men explained and made known to her, is, according to all the fathers of the Church, and interpreters of the scriptures, the very grace of Jesus Christ. It is that grace, without which we can do nothing, and with which nothing is impossible to us; that grace, by which (as the apostle says) we are what we are, if yet we be anything in the presence of God; that grace

which enlightens us, which attracts us, which persuades us, which converts us; that grace, which impels us to do good works, and withholds us from evil; that grace, which enables us to merit heaven, and come to the possession of it; that grace which operates in us, and with us, whatever we do for righteousness' sake, and which, by its efficacy, administers to us, in the order of salvation, not only in power, but will and action. This, beloved hearers, is the excellent gift, which it so much imports us to understand thoroughly; a perfect gift, which comes to us from above, and is bestowed on us by the Father of Lights; a gift superior to all the gifts of nature, and in comparison with which St. Paul disregarded and considered as dirt all the gifts of fortune, the gift of gifts, which none but Jesus Christ could merit for us, and which we received from the infinite mercy and goodness of God.

Of this gift, however, we are grossly ignorant; and through a criminal ingratitude, are at no pains to come to the knowledge of it. Hence it is, that we receive it so often to no purpose; and, far from employing it to the glory of God, and our own sanctification, we make it instrumental to our own perversion, and a contempt of God. For on this account it is that our Saviour says to us, as he said to the Samaritan: "If thou didst know the gift of God." Wherefore, Christians, let us endeavour, this day, to form a just idea of it; let us endeavour to penetrate into the immense treasures of divine mercy, and measure, as much as in us lies, its height and depth.

To dispose with sweetness, and execute with force, are the excellent properties which an inspired penman attributes to wisdom. But these properties (St. Augustin tells us) are agreeable only to the wisdom of God, in the degree of perfection which is expressed by these words: "From end to end wisdom reacheth mightily, and disposeth all things sweetly." Wis. viii. And, indeed, the wisdom of men, being so very limited, is liable to two quite contrary defects. Is she sweet in her conduct? There is reason to fear she will be weak in the execution. Is she firm in the execution? There is reason to apprehend she will be harsh in her conduct. When sweetness predominates it sinks into timorousness, and force degenerates into excessive severity. To the wisdom only of God it appertains to unite perfectly these two virtues seemingly so opposite. For, she alone hath the advantage not only of at no time separating sweetness from force, but of making her force to

consist in her sweetness. Now what Holy Writ says of God's wisdom, I may equally say of divine grace; as the grace I speak of acts in us as in the instrument of that supreme wisdom which, in God, is the principal cause of our salvation.

And this, Christians, is the clearest and justest idea I can give you of the grace of Jesus Christ; these are its characteristics—sweetness and force: sweetness, in the engaging manner it disposes the sinner to conversion; force, in the victories it gains over the sinner at the moment of conversion. Wherefore, without entering into a farther discussion, it will suffice to instance both the one and the other in the Samaritan woman. For, you will perceive the amiable methods of grace in gaining that sinner, and its marvellous power in the admirable change which it wrought in her heart, "from end to end reaching mightily, and disposing all things sweetly."

First, then, you shall see how the grace of Jesus Christ useth all the delights and attractives of its sweetness, in order to convert the Samaritan woman.

Secondly, how the grace of Jesus Christ, by its force and efficacy, converts the Samaritan woman, and, from the gulf of sin into which she was plunged, raises her, on a sudden, to the summit of righteousness.

These two positions include the whole scope, and make the division of the following discourse.

Part I. It is not at all surprising that sweetness should be the first characteristic of grace, which is the origin of conversion, an immediate emanation from the goodness of God, and the great end to which his pure and heavenly love for us tends. But it stands us upon to know exactly in what this sweetness of grace consists, which are its insinuations, what it operates in us, and in what manner God would have us correspond with it. And this is evidently what the Holy Ghost willed to make known to us by the conversion of that woman, whose example it is our duty, on this occasion, to apply to ourselves. For, what doth grace do, in order to subdue, entirely and completely, a rebellious heart, and make it yield obedience to the decrees of heaven? St. Augustin, and other divines after him, denominate it victorious grace, and such, in fact, it is. But the methods thereof differ widely from those of conquerors. In order to subdue us, it seems in some shape to submit to our will. Take not offence at this mode of speaking,

which, as you shall see, is no way derogatory either from the dignity or from the efficacy of divine grace, and which, in my apprehension, implies its sweetness. I say, that it seems to submit to our will, it waits for us, and bears with us whole years together. It is ever on the watch for favourable moments, and by a condescension which we can never sufficiently acknowledge, improves opportunities to gain us over. How much soever it is our interest to seek it, we are always prevented by it. Instead of taking forcibly, it asks placidly what it means to obtain; and instead of demanding haughtily and superciliously, it obtains only by solicitation and invitation. It asks (says St. Prosper) in order to give; and asks but little, in order to give much. It accommodates itself to our inclinations, our talents, our endowments of mind; and often, after the manner I am going to relate, to our imperfections and weaknesses. It imposes no difficult obligation on us, to which attractives are not annexed, and of which it creates not, notwithstanding our repugnance, a desire in our breast; for it commands us to despise the good things of this life, in proportion only as it shows their futility; makes us undertake great things for God, only by impressing our minds with a high idea of his perfections, and of the rewards which he promises; induceth us to renounce and hate ourselves, only by making us allow, from a view of our misdeeds, that this renunciation at least is just, and this hatred well-founded. Such, beloved Christians, is the economy of grace, such its sweetness; and such we see clearly is the procedure of our Saviour in the conversion of the Samaritan. A conversion which Christ proposes as a plain and obvious type of that which passes, day after day, by the mighty agency of his divine grace, between God and ourselves. Give ear, while I resume each article in order. There will be ample matter for your instruction and edification:

1st. I say that oftentimes grace waits for sinners, so as to tire out the patience of God. Behold Jesus Christ, the very force and power of God himself, weary, nevertheless, his spirits exhausted, in a pensive posture on the brink of a well. What doth he wait for? An infidel soul whom he means to save; a sinner whom he hath chosen. And with what is he wearied? If we adhere to the letter, with the length of his journey: "wearied with his journey." John iv. But as this God-man declared to his apostles in the same gospel, that he had meat to eat, to an infinite degree

more exquisite than that which they presented him, mysterious and divine meat, of which they were ignorant: "I have meat to eat which you know not of;" (John iv.;) so did he undergo quite a different fatigue from what outwardly appeared; a fatigue arising, beyond all doubt, from having so long borne with this miserable wretch in her criminal habit. For it must (says St. Augustin) have tired him out, and, in a great measure, have exhausted his patience. Yet he is not discouraged; and how distant soever this woman may be from the ways of God, how hardened soever in her sinful courses, he determines to wait for her, using in her behalf, if I may venture to employ the scripture phrase, those adorable delays, the delays of God, which keep back his anger, suspend his justice, and withhold his vengeance. On this account it was, that wearied, he sat. Now this uneasiness of God, notwithstanding the passions and revolts of his creature, is that which I call the sweetness of grace.

Ah! Christians! how many sinners, all over the world, and perhaps among those to whom I address myself at this very time, in the same situation as was that criminal and obstinate woman? That is, how many sinners, inflexible in their ways, have quitted God, have spurned at his goodness, and have provoked his wrath; and, by continually accumulating sin upon sin, and lapse upon lapse, and thereby increasing, without intermission, the weight of their iniquity, have become, as it were, a heavy burden on the hands of God—but still whose return his inexhaustible mercy condescends to wait for? To judge of the ways of God by the ways of men, perhaps his patience might be deemed a scandal, as the suffering on the cross was to the Jews; perhaps we might take it into our heads that he was wanting in zeal for his own glory, and that he did not maintain the sovereignity of his being with sufficient rigour. But this (say the fathers) is the very same thing by which he maintains it, and displays his glory; for none, but the patience of a God could arrive to so great a pitch. The patience of men, which is circumscribed by the narrow circumference of their heart, is soon at an end; but the measure of God's patience is the greatness of himself.

God is great, (says St. Augustin,) because he is eternal, because he is mighty, because he is God. And indeed nothing, if rightly considered, can be a stronger, or more convincing testimony of his dignity, than that tranquillity with which he beholds, and

suffers the offences of mankind. But, from this principle, beloved hearers, what conjecture ought to be deduced? Doth it follow that the sinner can pretend to a right of putting off his conversion, and obliging the Almighty Lord to wait, because he is willing? In this manner libertines and worldlings have reasoned in all ages, and do still reason; and it is this false reasoning and hellish presumption which confirmed them in all ages, and do still confirm them in their libertinism and vices. But God forbid, Christians, that we should make so perverse a use of his mercies! And whenever repentance is the point in hand, the most pernicious error we fall into is, to imagine that God, in his goodness, will wait for us. This is supported by a thousand arguments, strong and conclusive, of which a Christian cannot be ignorant, at the same time, of the most essential and received maxims of his religion. These are they: because if God waits for us, it is solely to his grace that we are indebted for it. Now nothing is more impious, nothing more senseless, than so to count upon that grace, as to avail one's self of it against God himself: "Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" Matt. xx. Because there are many for whom God waits not, and on whom, in order to strike others with terror, he is pleased to exercise his avenging wrath, by letting them die in their sin: "I go, and you shall seek me, and you shall die in your sin." John viii. Because with regard even to those whom God waits for, after the expiration of a certain time, he will not wait: "As yet forty days, and Nineve shall be destroyed." Jonas iii. Because it is uncertain how long God will wait, no secret being equally impenetrable to us, or hidden from us: "Who knoweth that God will turn and forgive." Jonas iii. Because our presumption alone, in promising ourselves that God will wait for us, is a sufficient inducement to make him not wait for us, lest his patience, (as Tertullian rightly observes,) which is one of his divine attributes, should serve to authorize and foment our crimes. All these, beloved Christians, are incontestable truths, which should make us observe a judicious mien between fear and affiance; truths, which indeed administer hopes of a grace sufficiently constant to wait for us, but which hinder us from indulging those hopes in such a manner as to live in impenitence; truths, the wonderful concatenation of which obligeth us not to make God wait too long, persuaded, indeed, that as yet he will wait for us, but that nothing, however, is so terrible as a God, whose abused patience is wearied out with waiting

the return of a sinner, or more punishable than a presumptuous sinner, who voluntarily and deliberately makes God wait for him. This point of doctrine would alone require an entire discourse; but I proceed to another.

2ndly. The Saviour of the world not only waits for the Samaritan woman, but, by a fresh instance of that sweetness which is discoverable in his grace, takes a favourable opportunity of conferring with her; a place separate from noise and tumult, whither he foresees she will shortly repair; a time convenient for this godly design, when she came to draw water, and when nothing could interrupt the divine lessons which he prepared to give her. Not that God hath occasion for contrivances of this nature to communicate his grace, nor that the grace of Jesus Christ absolutely depends upon occasions and opportunities, to produce its effects; whereas, on the contrary, it is grace that seizes the precious times of salvation, and opportunities to which our conversion is annexed. But ought we not in this to admire the ineffable goodness of God, who to draw us to his service, and to save our souls, is desirous to lay hold of the fittest opportunities; who, with that view, advantageously makes use of those we offer him; who gives, himself, occasion to many that never could have entered into our minds; who shows, by events the most unexpected and unforeseen, his providential care of us, and though equally deserving to be served in all places, and at all times, thinks it not beneath him to annex his grace to certain times and places.

When we read in Genesis, that Rebecca, going with her flock to water, met a servant who made her good fortune known to her, and mentioned the choice which God had made of her, to be the consort of Isaac; or in the Book of Kings, that Saul, going in quest of his father's asses, lit upon the prophet, who declared to him the views of God in his regard, and that the Lord had destined him to be the head of his people, we bless the amiable disposition of Providence. But this so amiable a disposition, Christians, is nothing but the type of what God would do, and what he doth every day in behalf of his elect. For is it not in this manner that he offers them his grace in favourable conjunctures? Is it not in this manner (if I may so express myself) that he lies in wait for them, and lays holy ambush, on certain occasions, which his infinite wisdom hath ordained, for their conversion and sanctification? And was it not for this reason that many virtuous and learned

divines (among whom is counted that incomparable doctor of the church, St. Augustin) made the mystery of grace—I mean that grace which we call efficacious—to consist in this partly, that it is imparted to us on occasions on which Almighty God foresees it will be salutary? Whereas, (continue they,) he dispenses his ordinary graces indifferently; that is, totally independent of certain circumstances and particular dispositions, in which we may be at the time we receive them. This doctrine is agreeable to that which the Holy Ghost tells the righteous man, the converted sinner: "In an accepted time have I heard thee, and in the day of salvation have I helped thee." 2 Cor. iv. There are, therefore, (conclude they, and with great reason,) in the predestination of men, times of grace and favour, in which salvation is not only more possible and easy, but more infallible and certain.

This is apparent in the Samaritan woman. But if we consider it in the true light, we shall find that our own case is parallel to hers. For, where is the man whom God hath moved by his holy inspirations, and recalled from the ways of sin and perdition, who will not attribute his conversion, in part, to some certain incidents, and who doth not recollect, that it was on those occasions that God opened his eyes, and spoke to his heart? Of this St. Augustin was thoroughly assured; and the avowal he made of it was a kind of homage he thought due to grace. It is in his "Confessions," that he points out, himself, every particular of the conflict he underwent; the trouble and agitation of mind he was in, the solitary garden into which he withdrew, the pious good friend who accompanied him thither, the example of the anchorets which put him to confusion, the passage of St. Paul which he read, and which planted daggers in his heart; when at last, this all-powerful grace transformed him into a new man, and made him yield submission, and give himself up to the pressing solicitations of the heavenly Spirit—thus he published it. And if we were to make a similar confession, might we not, in proportion, bear a like testimony to our own occurrences?

Which then, in our regard, is the capital point, and grand maxim of Christian wisdom? Imprint it in your minds, beloved hearers, and preserve the remembrance of it. It is diligently to watch, and not to let slip these favourable occasions. For how many things, the consequences of which are hidden from you, and which, to judge by appearances, are owing to chance, are so many means

which God hath chosen to withdraw you from the world, and on which, for aught you know of his will, he is pleased to make your predestination depend? For instance: the intercourse you hold with that servant of God, that pious book of which you relish the reading, that edifying and convincing sermon which you hear, that sudden death of your friend which terrifies you, that loss of an estate which brings you to distress, that disgrace which humbles you, that infirmity which obliges you, against your will, to lead a regular life, and hinders you from running into former excesses. If the designs of God were fully known to you, and you were certainly apprized that to this was annexed your eternal welfare, would you not be careful to make the best advantage of these occasions? Now you know enough of it at least to adore the secret decrees of that paternal Providence which governs you; and if you know no more, it is incumbent on you to spend your days in a more absolute dependance on that grace in which you place your confidence.

But you will tell me: if God hath annexed the grace of my conversion to this occasion, I shall certainly be converted. Granted, Christians: but it is equally certain, that you will never be converted without making good use of grace, and the circumstances which it hath prepared for you. For, whatever the nature of that grace may be, it is an article of faith, that its effect can never be separated from your faithfulness; and in whatever manner it may be said to act, we must always recur to these two words of our blessed Saviour—watch and pray. Pray, because you are unable to do anything without grace; and watch, because grace, all-powerful as it is, will do nothing for you without your concurrence. Pray, to the end that there may be a day of salvation for you; and watch, to the end that this day of salvation may not escape you. These are the two particular points—this the whole substance of a Christian's theology. But to proceed.

3rdly. I add, that the grace which works our conversion, how much soever it imports us to solicit it, is ever sure to prevent our solicitations: and this, according to the doctrine of the fathers, is its most essential quality. For, were I able to prevent it, it would be no longer a grace, because it would suppose in us the merit of preventing it. I know that through grace we may, though sinners, seek God, and find him. But never should we seek him (says St. Bernard) through grace,

had he not himself condescended to seek us. Now this is plainly seen in the conversion of the Samaritan. The Son of God waits not till she makes some advances toward coming to him, but accosts her, talks with her, engages her in such a manner that she doth not perceive it, in a conversation which is to be the principal cause of her salvation. Such is the mystery, and prodigy too, of Almighty God's love! He is desirous himself to prevent sinners: that is, he desires to seek vile creatures, to call rebellious and ungrateful souls to his service, criminal souls and deserving of his vengeance, weak and inconstant souls, whose infidelity and relapses he foresees: to seek them, I say, and be before hand with them, and, at a time, too, when they think not of him: I say more; at a time when they revolt from him, when they make head against him, when they have, in some shape, a disgust and horror of him. Ah! my Lord, might I cry, affected with the same sentiment as the pious St. Bernard, and applying to myself that tenet of our religion so opposite to Pelagianism. Ah! Lord, is it then true, that of myself I am unable to love you, quite amiable as you are; and that such is my wretchedness, as to deny me the power of wishing to be loved by you, if you raise not, yourself, that desire in my heart? Is it then true, that though you are the Almighty God, you are under a necessity of making the first step toward my reconciliation to you, or of suffering me to remain eternally your enemy? Would it not be enough that you were disposed to receive me? But at least, my God, since you are willing to begin, shall I not have the happiness of corresponding with your love? Shall I add to the unfortunate inability of preventing you, the unpardonable crime of not siding with you? No, my Lord, you make me too clearly see how much I am indebted to you, for my heart to remain in so mortal an indifference. As it is for the merit of your holy grace that it should first seek me, I will readily and willingly submit to that law. Yes, my God, I desire to humble myself with that view; I desire to acknowledge my weaknesses in your presence, and to blush at the thought, that I cannot, of myself, take a single step in order to come to you; and that, notwithstanding your infinite perfections, I am incapable to love you, unless you love me first. However, O Lord, it will be a powerful motive of gratitude and faithfulness; and the remembrance of of your infinite mercy in seeking me, notwithstanding my unworthiness, and in bringing me back into your holy ways, will hence-

orward attach me so strongly to you, that neither nature, nor passion, nor world with all its charms and allurements, nor any thing else, be it what it will, shall ever dissolve the sacred union. Such is the fruit which a Christian soul must draw from a profitable and solid consideration on this point of faith.

4thly. But further: in what manner doth grace prevent us? Authoritatively and imperiously? No, says the prophet. On the contrary, "it prevented us with the blessings of sweetness." Ps. xx. For if it prevent us, it is only by asking what it means to obtain; and in this (says St. Prosper) consists the difference between the law and grace: the law commands, and grace invites; the law constrains, and grace engages. Now this coalition of the law and grace makes the whole mystery of the amiable and supreme dominion which God hath over our hearts. Our Saviour might have chosen to use his divine power, and obliged the Samaritan to pay him, instantly and without reply, a forced obedience. But as it is his grace that operates in her, he will have her not only obey without repugnance, but with joy and love. How then doth he begin? By desiring her to hearken to his words, and believe: "Woman, believe me." John iv. For although God, by the efficacy of his grace, be master of our will, and may do with us according to his pleasure, he is backward, however, in the use of his power; and, if I may venture to use a scripture phrase, treats us with respect: that is, he inspires us, persuades us, asks us to conform our will to his; "Thou, the ruler of virtue, with great reverence disposest of us." Wis. xxii.

I say more: though absolute master, he asks but a little, in order to give much. What doth Jesus Christ ask of the Samaritan? A little water: "Give me to drink." And why water? In order to raise in her a desire of an infinitely more excellent water, which he intends to give her; a salutary and vivifying water: "a fountain of water springing up unto everlasting life;" (John iv.;) water that will quench our thirst eternally, and settle us in peace and felicity: "Whosoever shall drink of the water which I shall give, shall not thirst for ever." A noble idea this, Christians, of what daily experience informs us of concerning the methods of grace. What doth it require? scarce anything: a little attention to ourselves, a little regularity in our actions, a little discretion in our words, a little constraint in the performance of our duty. Give me this, (says God) it is certainly but little; yet upon this little

the most abundant and efficacious graces depend. And, indeed, it is often by this little, I mean by this little victory over passion, by this little violence done to humour, by this little sacrifice of temporal interest, by this little effort of Christian charity, by this little defalcation of worldly vanity, that we put ourselves in a condition to receive a plenitude of heavenly gifts, and the mercies of the Lord. It is by this that great changes and conversions begin; and are we not in a high degree to blame, if we obstinately refuse that which God requires, when the advantage which he promises so far exceeds that which he requires?

5thly. Proceed we, however, to a more affecting article. I hold with St. Chrysostom, that grace, in order to act with more sweetness, suits itself to our inclinations, to our taste, to our talents, and in some shape to our weaknesses, our imperfections, and our failings. Of this I have proof of the woman of Samaria already mentioned. Any one, but the Saviour of mankind, who had heard her dispute, and reason upon the most important points of religion, would have soon discouraged her, would have told her that it was not her business to dive into those matters; that those knotty, those refined, those subtile questions, were not her province; that it much better became a woman to know nothing of them: for with this trite, overbearing answer, have curious women been at all times foiled; an answer, on which the men are wont to to lay great stress. But our Saviour knew that they were not converted by such means; and that, far from reforming them, it soured their tempers, and made them more irritable. What then doth he do? He behaves in a manner directly contrary. This is a vain and curious woman, and he takes the advantage of her curiosity. She rates herself high for her knowledge and parts, and he deigns to argue with her on the most profound and sublime topics of religion. In instructing the vulgar, he made use of parables, that is, of plain and familiar comparisons, adapting his discourse to their gross understandings. But as to this woman, sinner as she is, he converses with her in terms proportioned to the grandeur and intricacy of the subject on which their conversation turns: the nature of God, the perfection of his being, the purity of his worship, adoration in spirit; and thereby undeceives her, without offending her, and removes the erroneous notions she had conceived relating to the Deity and the homage due to him.

Now is it not thus, that our minds and hearts are influenced by

grace? Is it not in this manner that it conforms itself to us, scarce ever sanctifying us—(mind this I beseech you)—scarce ever sanctifying us in a manner contrary to our natural inclinations, but perfecting them agreeably to God's holy will, in order to sanctify us. Are we quick and impetuous? It animates us with zeal, and impels us to the practice of good works. Are we tender, and susceptible of being easily moved? It inspires us with a tenderness of love for God, which not infrequently occasions our shedding floods of tears. Are we of a gentle and easy temper? It rectifies it, and converts it into charity for our neighbour. Are we of a rigid and severe disposition? It converts this severity into penitential fervour. St. Peter tells us, that it assumes as many different shapes, as it meets with different dispositions in us: "The grace of God is manifold;" (1 Pet. iv.;) grace, which induces us to be holy in the manner we should choose to be, did Almighty God leave it to our own option, and it were to be the result of our own deliberation; to the end, (says St. Chrysostom,) that under no pretext we be dispensed with from following it, as it desires to make use of our own endowments for the compassing of its ends; as it sets whatever is in us on work to bring about our salvation; as it requires no other constitution but our own, no other complexion or disposition but our own, no other talents or genius but our own, to bring us to be that which God would have us to be; in short, as in a sense which you sufficiently understand, we may, without ceasing to be what we are, become, by means of it, what we are not.

6thly. True it is, Christians, God obligeth us by this grace to despise all those things which the world esteems; to renounce from our heart the honours, the pleasures, the good things of this world; but herein "taste and see that the Lord is sweet." Ps. xxxiii. He doth not oblige us to renounce the world, before he hath made known to us, by his grace, its deceitfulness, and convinced us that it is impossible it should ever make us happy. He doth not oblige us to renounce the world, before he hath expelled from our heart, by his grace, our esteem and love of it. Now it is no hard matter to bid adieu to that which we neither esteem nor love. This is the lesson which our Saviour gives the Samaritan woman: "Whoever shall drink of this water, shall thirst again." John iv. That is, whoever is ambitious of honours in this world, how great soever his station may be, shall never be content

to be what he is; whoever endeavours to accumulate wealth, how full soever his coffers may be, shall never have enough to sate his desires; whoever is a slave to sensual appetites, how willing soever he may be to gratify them, shall never satisfy them. When once I am persuaded of this principle, I wean my affections from created things without reluctance. And are we not invincibly persuaded of it by the divine impression and lights of grace? Sometimes, indeed, it obliges me to perform difficult and painful things for God; but at the same time furnishes me with sufficient inducements, by the hope it gives me of the great, the inestimable things it promises: "If thou knewest (says our Saviour to this woman) the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, give me to drink." John iv. That is, Christians, if ye knew what God is; if ye knew what he hath done and merited for you; if ye knew what ye may expect from him; if ye knew the magnificent rewards he hath reserved for the humble, for the poor, for those who suffer and who mortify their senses on his account: if ye knew all this, your courage would be proof against the severest trials; and the heaviest crosses, with the sole view of being pleasing in his sight, would become not only supportable, but delightful. Now what but the grace of Jesus Christ informs us of all this? It cannot, indeed, be denied that this grace inspires us, according to the gospel doctrine, with a hatred of ourselves; but to inspire us with this evangelical hatred, it obligeth us to acknowledge our own meanness, our own unworthiness, our own corruption, our own transgressions. Whence we easily conclude that our true interest is, to hate ourselves in this life, if we intend to love ourselves for life everlasting. Thus the Son of God, to facilitate the repentance of the Samaritan sinner, makes her confess her crime; and by the salutary shame which she conceives thereof, reduces her, almost without her perceiving it, to the necessity of accusing and condemning her conduct, and by consequence of being converted, as it is in a sincere accusation and condemnation of one's self that true conversion consists.

Such, dear Christians, is the agency of grace. In this manner, God, neither by the sovereignty of his dominion, nor by the sublime light of his divine understanding, but by the sweetness of his grace, and of his holy spirit, becomes master of our hearts. It was necessary, in order to gain the hearts of men, that the increated wisdom of God should humble itself, and his majesty should stoop

in the person of the Saviour. Now just so it is, after God's example, that we shall insinuate ourselves into the souls of men, and exercise in them a power the more absolute, as it will appear the less. It will not be by authority, much less by the haughty spirit of sway, or by the ascendancy which we shall take, or affect to take; no, nor by superiority of abilities or understanding, but by the sage contrivances of Christian charity. To win our neighbour, and to move his heart, we must bear with his failings, compassionate his weaknesses, submit to his humours, be affected with his wants, take share in his concerns, and (according to the rule and expression of St. Paul) "put on, as the elect of God, the bowels of mercy." Colos. iii. This practical doctrine is applicable to us all; but to us particularly, beloved brethren, whom God hath called, in a special manner, to the ministry, for the conversion and sanctification of souls: to us, who, as priests of the heavenly Lord, are the dispensers of his grace, and are bound, by consequence, to regulate our conduct by the methods of grace. To us, I say, this doctrine is addressed; and therefore allow me to apply it to you, and to myself too, as it is a perfect model for all who are employed in our charitable functions.

By sweetness it is, that our zeal can affect the hearts of sinners. Any other means will fail of success. What, though you were endued with the knowledge of the doctors, and the eloquence of the prophets; what, though you should speak the language of the apostles, and even the language of angels; if it were not seasoned with evangelical mildness, it would little avail. Mildness it is, that must open the way for us to the hearts of men; without which we shall instruct them, convince them, perplex them, terrify them, but shall not convert them. We shall disturb consciences, drive the weak to despair, and exasperate the obstinate; but shall not bring them over to the service of God. The Saviour of the world appeared severe only with regard to the Pharisees; hypocrites, who, under the mask of piety, imposed upon the people; and by God's secret judgment, it was only with regard to them that his zeal was of none effect. I would not, however, my brethren, insinuate, that we should hide from sinners the deformity of their case, (you know how much I abhor such sentiments,) or should not oblige them to undergo the austerities prescribed by the gospel: the rigours of penitence, the crucifying of the flesh, the mortification of the senses. Wo is me, if in this doctrine I relax a tittle.

But to this severity, which alienates the thoughts of sinners from conversion, we must join mildness, in order to reclaim them. We must use it in the manner that grace adapts itself to the various dispositions of various persons, and not apply it without prudence or discernment—to some too much, to others too little; to some in a way unsuitable to their state, to others, in a degree exceeding their strength. We must not be wanting in pious addresses to induce them to take up with it, and even make them relish it; showing them that it is impracticable, and never carrying things to that excess, as to give the laity a handle to treat them as impossible. We must then use severity in the cure of souls; but it must be a discreet, an amiable severity, a severity that renders God's yoke supportable, and not a Pharaisaical severity without unction, an imperious severity, a severity agreeable to the condition of slaves, but no way suitable to the children of God. I would to God, brethren, that this truth were rooted in all their minds, as nothing could more effectually contribute to the sanctification of the Christian world. Be that as it may, beloved hearers, one thing there is which will render us inexcusable at the judgment of God, and that is, the infinite sweetness with which he governs us. If the powers of the earth, upon whom we depend, behaved so to us, they would soon be our idols. God Almighty would gain us by his holy grace, and yet we rebel against him. It remains for me to show, that this holy grace, though sweet in its manner of influencing the sinner, is not the less forcible in its action and impulse, which will manifestly appear from the sequel of the passage already mentioned, and which I am going to set forth in the second part.

Part II. How obscure soever faith may be, considered in itself, and in regard to its mysteries, its motives are founded (according to the universal opinion of divines) in a kind of evidence. My meaning is, that what it reveals is evidently credible, from the quality of the motives which oblige us to believe it. Now I have always thought, and still do think, that of these motives, one of the most powerful and convincing is, to see what the power of divine grace sometimes operates in souls, whom God (as the great apostle tells us) hath chosen and predestined to be vessels of his mercy. This, beloved hearers, will be a comfort to you. When Pharaoh's magicians saw the astounding prodigies that Moses performed all over Egypt by the touch only of his mystical rod, which

struck them with such terror, they confessed at last that "it was the finger of God." Exod. viii. That is, they discovered the characteristic of a divine power, of which this legislator and prophet was the instrument. And for my part, Christians, though I were to consider no more than the conversion of the Samaritan woman, as related in the gospel, I should certainly conclude without demur, that there is in us an active supernatural principle; that God hath secret invisible springs to move our hearts, and wind them as he pleases; that we receive from heaven impressions which only proceed from grace, and that by the divine operations of this grace, our liberty, without losing its indifferency and privileges, is perfectly submitted to the power of God.

Now in what consists the miracle of this extraordinary conversion? In the relation it bears to the two powers of the soul, to which internal grace is immediately communicated; namely, to the understanding and to the will; or, if you like that better, to the mind and to the heart. A miracle of grace, in the victory which it gains over the mind of the Samaritan. A miracle of grace, in the change which it works in the heart of the Samaritan. A miracle of grace, attended with circumstances which leave no room to doubt that it was the work of the omnipotent hand of God. Redouble your attention, beloved hearers, and thereby make up for the deficiency arising from the necessity of contracting into a small compass, a subject that would require a whole discourse.

1st. A miracle of grace, and of its force in the victory which it gains over the mind of the Samaritan woman. Only follow the thread of the sacred narrative, and you will agree to this. She was an infidel and a heretic, both together, as the Samaritans (according to Origen's remark) were idolaters in the main, continuing to adore the false gods of their ancestors, and yet practised, at the same time, a kind of Judaism, but a Judaism corrupted by their particular opinions; and accordingly they were separated by an avowed schism from the rest of the Jews: "For the Jews had no communication with the Samaritans." John iv. A heretic she was, vain and self-sufficient, opinionative and untractable, prepossessed with her error, and determined to maintain it, and pretending to argue with subtility and refinement upon religious topics; for, all this appears from the conversation that passed between her and Christ. Now you know the difficulty, the extreme difficulty, or rather moral impossibility, of making any one submit, particularly

a woman, and a woman too of this character. You know how unusual it is to see a woman, prepossessed with error, (I say prepossessed, for persuaded by argument she scarce ever was,) take proper measures to sift out the truth, and after candid researches, yield ready submission to it. Whether it be that creating inflexibility and obduracy of heart, is, by a woful fatality, peculiar to heresy; or that God, by a punishment due to this sin, which is, in one sense, the most grievous and punishable of all, is accustomed to overcast the mind with a cloud, which perpetually darkens it more and more, and which, for that reason, St. Augustin denominates penal blindness: however it be, you cannot be ignorant what efforts are requisite, and how it borders on a miracle, even in the order of grace, to return from the pride of heresy to the humility of the faith. Nevertheless, we now see, that grace doth all this by a divine virtue, a virtue beaming from the mercy of God. Christ converts this woman: he induces her first to embrace the purity of the Jewish worship, and forthwith she becomes a perfect Christian. After having made her renounce the superstitious practice of her forefathers, and the schism she was brought up in; after having made her condemn the errors which she maintained with such obstinacy and zealous attachment, he makes known to her what he is, and for what end he came; the scope of his legislation, the nature and quality of Messiah and Saviour, and his very divinity: mysteries naturally incredible, and which she could not discover but by means of the most pure and heavenly light of the grace imparted to her. Not only he reveals to her all these points, so important and so sublime, but convinces her of them, and gives her a relish for them. Though at first she declined conversing with him, she listens to him, at length, with docility and respect. Though every one, born of Jewish extraction, was hateful in her sight, she is willing, nevertheless, to acknowledge and adore him, Jew as he is, as the author of her salvation. Though whatever she sees in him hath the appearance of man, she protests and firmly believes he is the Christ, and the true Son of God. Must we not confess, that such a conversion was the work of the Lord, and cry out with David: "This change is made by the right hand of the Most High." Ps. lxxvi.

2ndly. But grace, in subduing the mind of the Samaritan, acted not more powerfully than in moving her heart. For beside her obstinacy in false belief, she was lewd and libertine in her moral

conduct. Sins, (says St. Chrysostom,) which, however, opposite, bear a kind of affinity one to another; because obstinacy in erroneous principles of religion is, properly speaking, a corruption of the mind, in the same manner that adultery and impurity are a rebellion of the flesh. Now God, (continues the same holy doctor,) the avenger and punisher of the one and the other, oftentimes disgraces the one by the other, by permitting revolts of the mind against truth, to be commonly followed by depravity of manners, and a fleshly life. And truly it is observable, that those so presumptuous and haughty souls in matters of religion, for the most part, are not the most steadfast in their duty, nor the most resolute in the hour of temptation.

Such, with her affected knowledge and subtilty, was the sinner of Samaria. She publicly cohabited with unmarried men, was abandoned to concubinage, a concubinage of which she had contracted a long and scandalous habit: "Thou hast had five husbands, and he whom thou now hast, is not thy husband." John iv. Now no disease is equally unsusceptible of cure with this. If there be a demon capable of resisting God and his grace, it is beyond dispute, the spirit of impurity. And yet herein, too, the grace of Jesus Christ shows its power and efficacy. This sinner, this prostitute, this woman—a slave to infamous passions—is cleansed from sin and robed with sanctity. It would seem as if Christ had given her another heart; and after taking from her that corrupted heart, the source of all her trespasses, he created in her a new heart, a heart not only purified from all the filth of sin, but from earthly affections. She no longer is that bare-faced cause of scandal, that incentive to wickedness, that lure held out by the ghostly enemy of mankind for the ruin of souls. She is "a new creature in Christ;" a soul entirely consecrated to God, and breathes nothing but his love; a soul whose thoughts are chaste, whose words are modest, whose actions are free from inordinate passion: a soul, whose conduct is a perfect pattern of sublime virtue, that diffuses on all sides the odour of her sanctity. What a prodigy, Christians! And ought we not, accordingly, to repeat the prophet's words: "This change is made by the right hand of the Most High?"

3rdly. If the grace of Jesus Christ works a miracle in the conversion of this woman, the miraculous manner in which it doth work it, shows very evidently its force and power. For, beloved Christians, is it not astonishing, that two such prodigious changes

as these should be no more to our Saviour than the business of a moment? When God acts according to the laws and the ordinary course of his providence, he proceeds, or seems to proceed with caution, and accomodates himself in the natural as well as supernatural order of things to our weakness. For he makes not men saints all at once; he sanctifies them gradually, and leads them by progressions, sometimes imperceptible, and step by step, to the summit of perfection, and a consummate sanctity. But when he acts sovereignly, and as the God of heaven, it is quite otherwise. He makes no previous alteration in the person whom he chooses for the subject of his agency. By one word's speaking, he calls forth myriads of beings out of naught; expands the heavens; fixes the earth; gives to this vast universe all its perfection: "He spoke, and they were made." Ps. cxlviii. Thus, the Son of God says but a word to the Samaritan, "I am He"—(John iv.)—the Messiah whom you expect; and behold! all at once she is convinced, she is moved; her heart is pierced with the most holy, the most lively, the most tender sentiments. A word (says St. Augustin) more efficacious than that with which Almighty God created the world. A word, which by a second, and much more admirable creation than the former, reformed in her heart the work of God which sin had destroyed. I say a creation more admirable than the former, inasmuch as in the former the non-existence on which God operates, obeys his word without contradiction; whereas, in the latter, the nonentity of sin, nonentity as it was, was capable to resist him.

I ask if anything externally appeared, that could give our Saviour so strong an influence over the mind of the Samaritan woman? Or what means did he use to obtain so easy and speedy a belief? Did she see him at that moment exerting his power over storms and billows, giving sight to the blind, raising the dead of four days? Ah! beloved hearers, this is the wonder that exceeds all the rest. The conversion of the world without a miracle—were there such an hypothesis—would (according to St. Augustin) be the greatest of miracles, would be the miracle of miracles; and the most convincing for a pagan who should obstinately disbelieve the other miracles. Now we see, beloved hearers, this miracle of miracles fulfilled in the Samaritan. The Pharisees and doctors of the law, every day saw the miracles of Jesus; they were ocular witnesses to them; they conversed with Lazarus whom he had pub-

licly raised to life, and talked with innumerable incurables on whom he had bestowed health; notwithstanding which, through an inflexible wilfulness, they persisted to the last in their incredulity. But this woman, without any miracle, not only believes in him, but is attached to his doctrine, addicted to his service, and forsakes everything to walk in his footsteps. And whence arises all this? From the omnipotence of grace, which needs only itself to gain a complete victory over the heart of man.

This is not all. When our blessed Saviour converted sinners, it was after having gained, by singular benefactions, a great share of their love and confidence, and of their esteem for his sacred person. To save their souls, he began by curing their bodily infirmities. He bore with their weaknesses, and brought them, by making them see in their necessities the power he had, to believe what he was. But being resolved to display in this sinner the great force of his grace, he converts her without any manner of attractive or interested inducement, save that of conversion. She believes not in him, like the woman of Canaan, because he delivered her daughter from the devil; nor like the woman troubled with the bloody flux, because he restored her health of body. She believes in him purely on his own account, and is attached to him without any other view of advantage than that of being his follower, and living in his service. And here it is that I discern the characteristic of a victorious and all-powerful grace: "This change is made by the right hand of the Most High."

In fine, from this the miraculous power of grace appears, that by sanctifying this woman, it sanctified the whole inhabitants of Samaria, as it enabled her to communicate the gift of faith to the Samaritan people. From a sinner, (according to the remark of St. Gregory,) she was changed into an apostle. Ere the apostles appear, she goes and announces Jesus Christ to those who know him not; and without derogating in the least degree from the dignity of St. Peter, or of the other apostles, it may be said, that the first apostle of Christianity was the Samaritan woman. And indeed, her zeal is inflamed in such a manner, that she waits not for a moment: she leaves her vessel, forgets what she came for, departs from Jesus Christ for Jesus Christ's sake; returns to town, and invites all the world to come and hear his words; choosing rather to labour for his honour and glory, than enjoy any longer the pleasures of his converse; and is hurried away, already, by the

sacred fervency and divine impetuosity of the spirit of faith, which is never content with the knowledge of God, if it spread not as wide as it can and ought to do it.

And now, Christians, what inference to be made from all this? Ah! let us not henceforward allege that our sinful state hath rendered us weak, and that our weakness is an insurmountable obstacle to conversion; let us own sincerely, that though weak of ourselves, we are all-powerful with the aid and by the force of grace, inasmuch as we "can do all things in him who strengthened us." Phil. iv. Let us diffide in ourselves, but put our trust in God. I know that to free yourselves from the bondage of sin, to break off that intercourse, to wave that connexion, to stifle that inclination, it is requisite that you make extraordinary efforts, and undergo sharp conflicts. But be of good heart, since God declares that "his grace (whenever you ask it with candour) is sufficient for you." 2 Cor. xii. It is chiefly in your infirmity that its virtue blazes forth in all its lustre; and your return to God—a willing, a speedy, a perfect return, will not be a greater miracle of his grace than the wonderful change in the Samaritan sinner: "For power is made perfect in weakness." 2 Cor. xii.

Besides—and this is the point of morality with which I shall conclude: God Almighty, of his mercy, hath drawn you out of the gulf; and if you have felt the impression of this grace, imitate the zeal of this edifying convert. She was, in all respects, as unqualified as you are to promulgate the gospel of God-made man; she bore no character that laid her under a greater obligation than you. What, therefore, should exempt you from the same duty? In quality of Christians, we all lie under an indispensable engagement to participate, each in his own department, of the apostolic ministry; and among all the faithful there is not one, of what profession soever he be, who is not bound, at least by his works—by good example, by an edifying life, and by charitable counsels, to preach Jesus Christ. On a father it is incumbent to preach to his children, and to take with him in his mind that he is their first apostle; that it is his province, as their father, to inspire them with religion, to tincture their minds with an early sense of it; to use all his endeavours to preserve it in their souls; otherwise, he deserves not the name of father, much less that of Christian. On a master it is incumbent to preach to his domestics, persuaded that (as the apostle says in express terms) if he neglect so necessary and

essential a duty, and suffer his household to remain in ignorance of the law of God, or not to put it in practice, "he hath denied his faith, and is worse than an infidel." 1 Tim. v. But converted sinners ought to be, of all, the most strongly affected with this duty. This obligation comes on them upon the score of gratitude and justice—of charity to their neighbour, and their own interest; and because they are unable by any other means to pay due tribute to Almighty God for their conversion. If, therefore, there were any among those who hear me, in this predicament; that is, who heretofore led a libertine life, but is now reformed by divine grace, and resolved to square his actions and conduct to the Christian precepts: behold! (would I say) dear Christian brother, the pattern which God lays to-day before you—the zeal and fervour of the converted Samaritan. Bring back, like her, as many sinners to Christ our Lord as your example can have weight and influence with, but especially the accomplices of your crimes and transgressions. Tell them, with David, that penitent king: "Come all and hear, and ye that fear God, and I will relate what great things he hath done for my soul." Ps. lxv. You need no evidence but my example: I will make known the favour which his infinite mercy conferred upon me. I was entangled in the same engagements as you; in the same excess and scandal as you; but the grace of my God hath broken the chains with which I was bound, hath dissipated the clouds that had obscured my sight, hath extinguished the passions with which I was transported. Like you, I regarded as folly and weakness whatever was told me of eternal truths: but the grace of my God hath opened my eyes, and convinced me of my folly. Like you, I believed that the change would be impossible; that I should never be able to form the resolution of quitting my criminal and inveterate habits; that I should never be able to bear the irksomeness of a well-regulated and retired life; that solitude and self-converse would be melancholy, tiresome, and insupportable: but by the grace of my God, all these difficulties are now removed; I have subdued nature, and trodden custom underfoot; I am totally disengaged from the world and its charms; instead of the uneasiness and disgust which I feared, I have found tranquillity of mind and joy of heart. And oh! that I cannot lay open my heart to you! That I cannot discover and make you feel what I have felt, since first it was rescued from the tyranny of sin, and it began to enjoy the blessings of freedom! "Come

and hear, and I will relate what great things the Lord hath done for my soul."

Ah! Christians, what cannot one thoroughly converted do for the glory of God! How forcible is his testimony in favour of the truth! The Samaritan alone almost converted a whole country: and how many sinners might reform, by their penitence, whole towns and cities! Inspire, O Lord, inspire this audience with that blessed zeal. Send down upon them your holy Spirit; and, moved by his sweetness, and impelled by his force, may they return into your ways, and make those by their example return into them, whom they have kept away from them by the scandal of their lives; and may we all, by these means, in due course of time, meet in the enjoyment of the same glory.

SERMON XX.

ON REMORSE OF CONSCIENCE.

"*When Jesus came near Jerusalem, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying: If thou hadst known, even thou, the things belonging to thy peace!*" LUKE xix.

THAT solemn day on which the Son of God, attended by his disciples, made his public entry into Jerusalem, amidst shouts of acclamation: that day of the Lord's visitation, my brethren, was (according to Christ's own words) the day of that incredulous city; as on that day of grace it was that the Saviour of men came to bring it fresh light, and to try, for the last time, to work its conversion. He foresaw the consequences of that unfortunate people's infidelity; the extreme blindness into which they would fall; the afflicting extremity to which too powerful an enemy would reduce them; the dreadful storm, plunder, and desolation that would ruin their city, and disperse themselves throughout the globe; the hatred of all nations which they would incur. Melancholy, indeed, but infallible effects of their resistance to the voice of heaven, and to the pressing insinuations of the divine mercy. These are the

things which the Redeemer of Israel had in mind, and which he meant to prevent by softening and gaining their rebellious hearts.

This figure, beloved Christians, excellently represents the ways of God with respect to sinners. For the sinner, however immersed in sin, hath days of salvation as well as Jerusalem, in which God prevents him, in which God speaks to him, in which he recalls him. This vigilant and sympathizing shepherd would save the strayed sheep that is going to throw itself down the precipice; would bend the obstinacy of the hardened soul, and bring her back in order to preserve her from his vengeance. To this end it is, that he speaks to her, follows her, importunes her—not always, indeed, by the voice of his ministers, nor in any manner perceptible to the eye, but secretly and by himself: I mean, by certain secret reflections with which he inspires her, and which feelingly strike her; by certain inward reproaches which sting her, and give her disturbance. Ah! beloved hearer, I would to God you discerned, on these occasions, the gift of God! I would to God you profited by that salutary uneasiness, which only tends to give peace to your souls: "If thou hadst known the things belonging to thy peace!" To show you, therefore, the fruit you must draw from such uneasiness, and in the strongest terms to exhort you to beware of losing such fruit, is of the utmost consequence. Accordingly, it is what I purpose to treat of in this discourse; I purpose to enlarge upon remorse of conscience.

To intimidate the sinner by terrifying menaces, and, after sin, to raise in his breast continual alarms—to depict in his mind the image of his vices, and, without intermission, to represent to him the whole deformity of them; to allow him no rest, but incessantly to disquiet, to agitate, to torment him: is not this, Christians, to treat him as a foe, and to aim at his destruction? But by a rule directly contrary, I hold, and shall show you that God, however offended and exasperated, cannot give a more solid testimony of his love to criminal man, than by creating and stirring up these latent remorses in the bottom of his heart. Whence I infer, at the same time, that man, on his part, is never more culpable nor more unfortunate, than by resisting God in this holy assault, and not submitting to be overcome by the Master who wounds him only to cure him, and throws him down only to raise him up. Here, then, Christians, is the whole scope of this discourse. I say that remorse

is one of the most precious and most efficacious graces of God; and from thence I infer, that not to yield to it, is, in sinful man, one of the greatest and justest causes of reprobation. Never doth God act more favourably by the sinner, than when he presses him by the reproaches of his conscience; and never doth the sinner offend God more sensibly, than when he shuts his ears to these reproaches, and refuses to hearken to them. In this discourse, therefore, I shall endeavour to show you,

First, the mercy of God, in granting us that grace which occasions in our hearts a remorse of sin.

Secondly, the malignity and misfortune of the man who obstinately resists this grace, in order to persevere in sin.

These two heads are worthy of your attention. But if in this audience there are any sinners (and that there are I have reason to believe) at strife with their consciences, it is to them particularly I this day address myself. And by all the concern which I have, and which they themselves still more should have, for the salvation of their souls, I earnestly conjure them to apply their minds to a subject that regards them in a particular manner, and to which, perhaps, it hath pleased the Almighty to annex their conversion and eternal welfare.

Part I. In order thoroughly to make you comprehend my meaning, and to give you a full knowledge of the first position which I purpose to make good, I shall here reduce it to a few propositions, which I beseech you to take exactly with you in your minds, for they are linked together, and have a necessary connexion with one another.

I say, then, that the remorse which we feel after sin, is an internal grace; that it is the first grace which God gives the sinner in order to his conversion; that this is one of the most miraculous graces, if we duly consider the manner in which it is produced in man; that it is, of all his graces, the most worthy of the greatness and majesty of God; that there is no grace more constant, or less liable to withdraw itself from us; that it is the grace which God most generally and most universally makes use of for our salvation; that this grace alone makes all other graces work upon our hearts; that it is a grace of light more convincing and proper than any other to keep the mind in subjection; in fine, that it is the most absolute and authoritative to bend the will and submit it to God. Could you have thought, beloved hearers, that in the reproach of

conscience so many advantages and so great treasures had been included? This, however, I am going to demonstrate; and you shall see that this subject, how barren soever it may seem at first view, is extremely extensive, and one of the most copious. The proofs shall be drawn from principles of theology, but a theology in which you shall find nothing irksome, and which will give me an opportunity of discussing a most edifying moral subject.

At the moment we sin, we feel within ourselves a remorse of conscience, a reproach which it makes us for our having sinned. I say that this remorse is a grace; and this is the ground on which are raised all the subsequent points of doctrine. For, what is grace? And how many Christians are unacquainted with it, although they daily feel its influence? Grace (say the schoolmen) is an aid and assistance which God gives man, to the intent he may act and merit for heaven; and, if he be a sinner, may labour for his conversion. Now all this perfectly tallies with the synderesis, or remorse of conscience, which rises in the heart after sins committed. For, it is very certain that God is the author of it, that it is love which induces him to stir it up in us, and that he uses it as a means to work our conversion. Whence I infer, that this remorse includes all the qualities of a true grace, there is nothing more certain, than that God is the source from which it arises, inasmuch as the scripture declares the same thing to us in a thousand places. Yes, (says the Almighty, speaking to a sinner,) it is myself will reproach thee with the sinfulness of thy crime. When, after committing it, thy conscience shall disturb thee, attribute thy disturbance of conscience to me, and to no other cause. A hundred times, after yielding to temptation, thou wouldst have hid thy shameful doings from thyself; thou turnedst away thy eyes, not to see thy sin; thou flatteredst thyself that I would do the same, and fall in with thy notions: "Thou thoughtest wickedly that I was as thyself," (Ps. xlix.,) but thou art mistaken; for, being thy Lord and thy God, I will always declare myself to be thy accuser; and as often as thou shalt commit an offence against me, I will, whether thou wilt or not, lay before thee thy iniquity in all its horrors: "I will reprove thee and set them down before thy face." Ps. xlix.

You see, Christians, how remorse of conscience originates with God. But what induceth him to excite it in us? Paternal love, supreme goodness, and infinite mercy. And doth he not explain himself to the same purpose to his beloved disciple in the Reve-

lation? "Such as I love, I rebuke and chastise;" (Apoc. iii.;) and it is by chastising them that I show my love for them. But what occasion for other testimony than the word of our Saviour, when he announced to his apostles the coming of the Holy Ghost: "When he shall come, he will reprove the world of sin." John xvi. And by whom will it be reproved? By the Spirit of Truth which I shall send to that purpose. And what means he by the Spirit of Truth? The substantial love of the Father and the Son, the Divine Person who is charity itself. Observe, beloved hearers, that it is the love of God which reproves us when we are sinners: "He will reprove the world of sin." And now is there the least room to doubt that the remorse of our conscience is not a grace?

It is not an external, but an internal grace, as it is in the very bottom of our souls that this gnawing worm of remorse is formed. Wherefore the apostle of the Gentiles tells us, that God "hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying out." Gal. iv. This divine Spirit (as St. Augustin observes) cries out, not after the manner of a preacher, who speaks to us, and reproaches us with the viciousness of our life: for not all the preachers in the world have it in their power to probe the conscience; and, however, their words may strike the ear, they are far from pervading the human heart. But the Spirit of God, the better to be heard by us, holds, as I may say, his place in the centre of us; and from thence, (says St. Augustin,) he incessantly cries out in opposition to our passions, censures our pleasures, and condemns our sins. Ah! Christians, can we carry our ingratitude to that pitch, as to think the contradiction of the holy Spirit an importunate rigour, and not confess, that it is a gift of his grace, a mercy on the sinner, a help to salvation, and a favourable means of bringing him back from the path of wickedness to the way of God? Can we blindly suppose the sting which pains us an insupportable pain, and wish to be rid of it? No, my Lord, we will never entertain such dangerous notions; and as we are assured that it is your Spirit, the divine comforter, which raises these salutary remorses in us, we will always receive them as benefactions from your hand; and, far from complaining, will only think of giving fresh proofs of our love and gratitude by our constancy and fidelity.

But I proceed, and add, that of all the graces which God gives the sinner to work his conversion, remorse of conscience is the first and the chief. My meaning is this: only figure to yourselves,

beloved Christians, how man, by sin, relapses into a kind of annihilation, whence God had drawn him by the grace of baptism and justification. That is, at the very instant that the soul is defiled with sin, she is devested of all merit, deprived of all right to heavenly glory, devested of all the virtues and gifts of the Holy Ghost, deserving to be despoiled of all the succours of grace, and, considered in a supernatural light, finally reduced, as it were, to annihilation; so that she cannot, of herself, move a single step, in order to return into the favour of God. Therefore it is requisite that God prevent her, and through his great mercy be reconciled with his enemy, the sinner. Now this is what is done by preventing graces, the first of which is, by remorse of conscience; the first expedient of the divine benignity to dispose and prepare the heart for repentance, and by which the Holy Ghost finds means of anticipating his own entrance into our souls. It may not be improper to confirm this doctrine by an illustrious example.

David falls, becomes an adulterer, and forthwith a murderer. God might have reprobated him as well as Saul, but he did not. So far from it, he makes him a most singular object of his mercy. But how doth he begin? You know it was by inspiring him with a remorse of conscience, by which that prince was deeply affected. At the voice of the prophet, David cries out, "I have sinned;" I am guilty of a two-fold injustice; I have yielded to the flesh, and spilt innocent blood. This was, properly, that upbraiding of conscience which is its own accuser, and was the first impulse by which that criminal king was induced to a thorough repentance. We read not in Scripture, that he gave, till then, any signs of repentance. Hitherto he had not poured forth tears, had not girded his loins with rough hair-cloth, had not mortified his body with rigorous fasts. The reason of it is, that in the order of grace, remorse of sin must have been a forerunner to all this; and therefore it was, that I said remorse, in respect to the sinner, was the first grace in the way of salvation, the first call of God who invites us to return to him, the first faint glimmer of light which we behold in the shades of death in which sin hath buried us. And did not God likewise lay the same thing before the eyes of Cain, when, after reproaching him with the unworthiness of his sacrifices, and desirous to preserve that unfortunate wretch from the despair into which he was ready to sink, he said unto him: "Why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest ill, will not thy sin be pre-

sently at thy door," (Gen iv.,) to disturb thee with remorse? It is this remorse that oppresses thy spirits; and yet this it is that ought to animate thee, and fill thee with confidence, being a sentiment of grace with which I inspire thee, and which shows I have not as yet abandoned thee. This is the interpretation which St. Ambrose puts on the words I have quoted; an interpretation coincident with the terms of the scripture. For, certain it is, that God, at that time, spoke to Cain with a view to give him consolation. But have you remarked the few words that comprise my proposition? "Presently thy sin shall be at thy door." Your sin, or, as the fathers of the Church explain it, the remorse of your sin, shall instantly be felt at the entrance of your heart. Which plainly shows, that remorse takes the lead of all other graces, and that thereby it is, that our merciful God makes the first impression on a rebellious soul: "Presently thy sin shall be at thy door." Ah! Christians, ought not this alone to make it infinitely dear to us! How then! this internal reproach which I feel of my crime, is the first inquiry which God makes after me, is the origin of all the graces which I have reason to hope for from him, is the commencement of my happiness, and therefore, in how great estimation shall I hold it. But to proceed.

I advanced another proposition, to wit, that of all graces, remorse of conscience was the most miraculous in the manner of its production. But in what doth this miracle of grace consist? In this, that sin, so opposite in itself and in its own nature, to the graces of God, should yet give rise to the graces we are speaking of. For, it is worthy of observation, that remorse of sin is occasioned and propagated by sin itself. Neither can it be denied, as I have already shown, that remorse is a grace. Therefore, it is certain, that this grace is extracted as out of its source and origin, from the nonentity of sin. Whereupon St. Chrysostom, adoring the providence of the Deity, cries out: how admirable, O God, is your mercy in its decrees! how powerful in its operations! how ingenious in its dispensation for the conversion of men! We do not perceive it. Nevertheless, O Lord, you work miracles of grace with a view to save us, at the very time that our offences should provoke you to work miracles of justice with a view to punish us. For, from the sin which we have just committed, you draw forth the grace which reproaches our heart with having committed it. In order to robe us with the stole of innocence, you

make use of that which rendered us culpable; you make use of that which caused our death, in order to procure us the blessing of life.

It will, perhaps, be urged, beloved Christians, that it is beneath the majesty of the supreme Being, having received so flagrant an injury from man, to condescend so as to seek him, and prevent him with his holy grace, and be desirous of attracting him; and that so to incline towards a rebellious creature would derogate from his greatness. But it is a wrong notion, and your mistake proceeds from your ignorance of the nature and quality of grace. For, in all this, God perfectly maintains his majesty and his dignity. He calls, indeed, sinful man back to his duty, but without diminution of his supreme authority. He takes the first step, but he takes it as the Sovereign Lord and Ruler of all things. For, you must not imagine that this remorse is one of those graces by which Almighty God calls the sinner to return; of those graces by which he lovingly invites the sinner; of those graces accompanied with sweetness and celestial unction. Know then what God doth by the grace of remorse. He rises up against us with an indignation equally severe and majestic, saying to our heart: "Thou hast betrayed thy God." He lays us under a necessity of confessing ourselves guilty, and by obliging the conscience to say, "I have sinned," therein authoritatively spreads the terror of his judgments. In short, if the manner in which he prevents us be really a grace, it hath all the appearance of a real chastisement.

This, St. Chrysostom hath finely represented in the person of Achab. Consider, my brethren, (says this holy doctor,) the effects which the remorse of his injustice toward Naboth had on that prince. Achab was a king, nay, a most absolute king. He could not brook the least contradiction, and pretended that every thing must be regulated according to his will and pleasure. Yet so soon as he hearkens to the voice of his conscience, his conscience that upbraids him with the violence of his procedure against one of his subjects—he is melancholy, dejected, confounded, abashed, extended on the ground, not daring to lift up his eyes to heaven. Never did he appear so humbled and debased in the presence of God. What but the remorse of his sin could operate so great a change? That remorse, therefore, was a grace of God. Yes, (says St. Chrysostom,) but a commanding grace, by which God treated Achab as a slave, and not as a king; with the severity of a judge, and not the endearments of a loving father. And accord-

ingly this grace completely answers the idea which we have of our God, as the greatest and most powerful of all masters.

There is another very estimable advantage attending this remorse. Of all God's graces, there is not one so constant, or so little liable to withdraw itself from us. For, Christians, there are graces which St. Augustin denominates tender graces, because easily lost, and because sometimes God deprives us of them for slight infidelities. But remorse of sin is a steadfast, settled, permanent grace; a grace which hardly ever quits us; which follows us into every corner of the world; with which God favours us in our own despite, and which it is beyond the power of man to rid himself of. For into whatever part of the world we should go, we should there find ourselves; and, finding ourselves, we should find our sin. As if Almighty God should say to the sinner: it is to no purpose that thou endeavourest to escape me; my mercy is determined to cleave to thee and pursue thee wherever thou goest; I have a grace that is proof against all contradiction, and it is remorse of conscience. Do what thou wilt, it will go in quest of thee, in the most infamous scenes of debauchery, in the hurry and confusion of the most noisy revels, in the most secret solitude and silent retirement. It is then it will act with the greatest force, and will be most busy in delineating before thy mind's eye the two-fold image of thy crime and thy duty. Such in reality is the nature of this grace, that the more unworthy one renders one's self of it, the more it adheres to one. It comes forth with sin, it grows up with sin, and will cling to the conscience, until the conscience shall relinquish sin. And is not this a very singular privilege? A grace always ready to aid us on every the most desperate occasion; and much more steady in opposing our viciousness, than our viciousness is headstrong in combating against it.

This is not all. As the grace of remorse is the most constant in its duration, it is in its extent the most universal. For we cannot say of it what the psalmist said of the particular graces which God conferred on the people of Israel, that they were not for barbarous and pagan nations, and that God reserved them for a small portion of the earth, Judea: "He hath not dealt so with any nation." Ps. cxlvii. This grace is indiscriminately common to all mankind. It is not only the righteous, like holy David, that, after having yielded, through human frailty, to the blandishment of sin, feel remorse of conscience, but traitors like Judas, fratri-

cides like Cain, the reprobated like Esau, all without exception, since there is, as St. Paul emphatically expresses it, "tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil." Rom. ii. Nay, (adds St. Augustin,) conscientious remorse, it should seem, is the appropriate grace of sinners; for is it not to them that God communicates it the most frequently, the most abundantly, and the most efficaciously? Ah! Christians, how comfortable it is for a man habituated to criminal practices, to be able to say: how great a sinner soever I be, I have still room to hope; God hath still graces in store for me, as well as for saints. True it is, he hath graces for his saints, to which we sinners have no pretension; but he hath graces for his enemies, and these graces are remorses of conscience.

What though this were all, beloved Christians, would it not sufficiently demonstrate that there is not a sinner in life entirely destitute of the benefit of grace? And is it not, therefore, with reason that God lays a strict command even on the ungodly, to return to him, as there is not one of them that hath not at least the help of his grace, this reproach of sin? For (by the way) it is certain, that there is not a sinner on earth exempt from the obligation of making reparation to God, and to whom God doth not say: I insist that thou return by way of penance. This is undeniable. Therefore, there is not a sinner to whom this precept is impossible, and consequently who hath not some grace of repentance, when he is under an obligation of repenting. Of this we have proofs beyond all doubt. But though we had not, what more convincing would you have than this? Is it not sufficient to know that there is not a sinner unexposed to the stings of conscience?

Admirable, however, is another property of the grace of which I am setting forth the value: it is the most secure for the sinner, and the least liable to delusion. In other graces he runs the hazard of being deceived, as the angel of darkness oftentimes transforms himself into an angél of light. Hence it is, that we take temptations for the graces of God and his holy inspirations: for instance, (says St. Ambrose,) a secret presumption for an impulse of hope, a natural tenderness of heart for a sentiment of divine love. But the remorse of sin is a certain grace, under the veil of which the enemy of men is unable to hide himself. For, nothing (continues this same holy father) is farther from his thoughts, than to show the

sinner the irregularity of his crime. So far from it, he uses his endeavours to conceal the shame of it, to diminish the heinousness, and efface from his mind the very remembrance of it. Therefore, Christians, when it happens that your conscience, after sinning, is disturbed with remorse, say with confidence: it is God that speaks to me, I know his voice—this reproach can proceed only from his holy grace; nor is there anything to be feared by hearkening to it, as it will only inspire me with a horror and regret of my vicious life. Now, effects like these are never produced by the father of lies. It is what you should say, beloved hearers, and such confidence will be a more powerful motive toward bringing you to God.

For, besides the other advantages arising from remorse of conscience, one in particular is worthy of observation: that all the other gifts of our God, without this grace, are steril in regard, and that with it they are efficacious, because this grace makes them act for our conversion and our sanctification. And, indeed, Christians, to no purpose would God impress us, in the state of sin, with the fear of his justice, and kindle in our hearts the fire of his love: for if remorse hurts not the conscience, making it cry, "I have sinned," all the rest are useless; and when once it is felt, it communicates a particular and sanctifying virtue to all the rest. As if you should say—I have sinned; therefore I should fear God who is my Judge: I have sinned; therefore I will have recourse to the mercy of my God, to implore his favour: I have sinned, and by sinning am estranged from my God; therefore I must return and be united with him by a holy love. Without remorse, I should never reason in this manner, nor even be converted. The reason of it is given by Zeno of Verona. The conversion of a sinner (says this holy bishop) is performed in the manner, however unusual, of a judicial trial. The culprit is acquitted, if he pleads guilty; but by pleading not guilty, he is sentenced to die. As, therefore; it is certain, that in courts of judicature, every procedure in criminal causes that is not grounded on the action of the prosecutor and depositions of witnesses, is null and void; so all other graces are of no force toward the sinner's justification, unless upheld by the remorse of his conscience, and the testimony he bears against himself.

And now, Christians, I shall make it appear, that the grace of remorse is more convictive than all the rest in disposing the mind

of man to repentance. For, what is more forcible to that effect, than to oblige the sinner to be his own accuser, saying, "I have sinned?"—than to produce against him an irrefragable witness, which is his own conscience, saying, "Thou hast sinned?"—than to reduce him to the necessity of pronouncing sentence of condemnation against himself, saying, "I am a sinner, and have deserved hell?" Now all this is included in the charge which conscience brings against a criminal soul. And this (says St. Gregory, pope) is what renders this remorse insupportable, and by consequence what renders this grace invincible. For whereas in judgments instituted by men, the witnesses may be suborned, the prosecutors may be prejudiced, and it often happens that the testimony of one is not conformable to that of another; so that in them the proof is hardly ever full. On the contrary, in a conscience disturbed with remorse, there can be neither supposition, nor passion, nor prepossession, because it acts in opposition to itself; and moreover as it performs the three offices of accusation, of judgment, and of condemnation, the sinner is absolutely necessitated to yield to it, because its testimony is an evident demonstration, paramount to all the arguments in the world.

Hence it follows, that this grace is also the most powerful over the heart of man, in making it pay submission to the orders of God. And in fact, what sinner is so excessively hardened as not to feel any stings of conscience? And if he doth feel them, how can he bear them so as not to exert his utmost endeavours to extricate himself from so painful a situation, by relinquishing sin? It is sometimes matter of astonishment to us, that the fathers of the Church, describing the nature of an irregular conscience, represent it in the character of a domestic executioner that torments the sinner. What would they insinuate by this figurative mode of expression? That remorse of conscience, although it arises from the spirit of love, and is a real grace, nevertheless restrains—with the force, and as it were, barbarity of an executioner—rebellious souls, and subjects them to God. Ah! Christians, this is the grace that hath at all times worked the greatest conversions in the Christian religion, and that constantly brings about such marvellous changes all over the world. Whenever you see, in town or country, that a person reforms his moral conduct, and by the life he leads, condemns the scandal of his past misdeeds, say: "It is owing to conscience;" or, it was God that made use of conscience to com-

pass it." Yes, conscience it is that rends rocks and moulders stones, in order to form them into the sons of Abraham. Conscience it is, (as St. Jerom expresses it,) that opens sepulchres, that is, souls, in order to attract, by salutary confessions, the venom hidden in them. In fine, conscience it was, that gave St. Agustin to the Church of God. That incomparable man renounced not sin, till compelled to do so by remorse of conscience. This was the grace, the victorious grace, that subdued his heart. The Almighty armed him against himself, and engaged him in a conflict in which he was worsted. Hitherto he had resisted every other grace; but to that of remorse he was forced to yield, by that of remorse he was fortunately vanquished. What treasures, O God, in a single grace! And, therefore, how a sinner is indebted to your mercy for thus reclaiming him, and bringing him back to your holy service.

Some there are, according to the prophet, whom passion sways, and who are immersed in vices; who boastingly talk of internal tranquillity, though strangers to a truly peaceful mind: "Saying, peace, peace, and there was no peace." Jerem. vi. But herein, O Lord, I easily discover that they are abandoned to iniquity, and that you treat them according to all the severity of your divine judgments, because there is nothing more dangerous or dreadful than peace in sin; neither can it be denied, that you never exert a more terrible vengeance, and that then it is the eternal reprobation of a soul commences.

According to the same prophet, there are other sinners, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who repent, and embrace a penitential life, and protest it is remorse of their sins that disturbs the peace of their souls, and brings them to it, as it were, by compulsion. Lord, (say they,) you deceived us favourably, when, in your disgrace, and in our criminal habits, "we look for peace, and behold trouble." Jer. viii. We sought out a proper remedy for the evils, "a time of healing, and behold disturbance. We acknowledge our wickedness, [because] we have sinned against thee our Lord." Jer. xiv. For by the agitation which you raised in our consciences, you made it experimentally appear to us that sin was our greatest enemy, and that you yourself were our supreme good and our whole felicity.

It is, therefore, true, beloved hearers, that remorse of conscience hath all the qualities of the completest grace. But, this being

granted, where lies our crime, when, in a state of sin, we despise the unceasing voice of conscience. This is that which remains to be discussed in few words. The mercy of God, which bestows on man the grace which forms remorse of conscience, you have seen in the first part; the malignity and misfortune of the man who resists this grace, to persevere in sin, you shall see in the second. May I crave your attention a moment longer.

PART II. In order to discover at once the malignity and misfortune of the man who will not give ear to the voice of his conscience, the best method to be followed is, to resume the various qualities peculiar to the grace of which I have stated the advantages, and contrast them with the different degrees of resistance which may be remarked in the sinner's wilfulness. This presents to me a large field wherein to expatiate, but which I shall contract into narrow limits. Hearken, I pray you, to my way of reasoning.

In the state of sin, the reproach my conscience makes me of my evil state, is a grace. If, therefore, I neglect this reproach, I resist grace, and do all I can to stifle it in my heart. It is by no means a natural emotion, but an inspiration from above, which I suppress and render unprofitable to salvation. Of my this grace the Holy Ghost is the author, and he it is that reproves me for my sin. Whence it follows, that by resisting this grace, I resist the Holy Ghost, and that then I am one of those uncircumcised in heart, of whom St. Stephen spoke, when he said to the Jews: "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart, ye always resist the Holy Ghost." Acts vii. How did they resist him? St. Chrysostom asks. By refusing to listen to the remorse of their conscience, which reproached them with not receiving Christ as their Messiah. You gave him up to death, and not satisfied with that, instead of acknowledging the horror of the Deicide, which, to bring you to repentance, represents its deformity to your imaginations in its whole extent, you persist in your crime. Wherefore I say that you are an unruly race, and that you harden your hearts against the Spirit of God: "Ye always resist the Holy Ghost."

Now is not this exactly what the sinner doth in the warmth and impetuosity of the passion that possesses him? His conscience tells him: that is forbidden; it is injustice, it is revenge, it is a breach of faith. No matter, (replies he,) I will give scope to my desires, nothing shall withhold me. Is it possible to conceive a

more formal resistance, or a more express and outrageous contempt of the law? "Ye always resist the Holy Ghost."

This evil, however, is carried to a still greater length, and the consequences of it are terrible indeed. For whereas remorse is the first grace to promote salvation, and the chief means of the sinner's conversion, what is the consequence of his not yielding to the force of its impression? He renders ineffectual, so far as he is concerned, the inexhaustible fountains of divine mercy: and, if the expression be not too bold, in some sort puts it out of God's power to save him. And truly, Christians, how can you expect that, after this, God will stretch forth a helping hand, and draw you from the way of perdition in which you remain in spite of him? Do you suppose that he will afford you other graces? But that he cannot do, according to the ordinary rules of his providence. For, resolved it is in the eternal decrees of his providence, that remorse shall precede, or shall be the commencement of every other grace. Do you flatter yourselves that God will proceed in a special manner on your account, and will change the order of your predestination? No, he will not: and you have not the least pretension to it. That as this change is no way necessary, it is your duty to conform to his laws, and not to expect them to be changed a tittle on your account. Consequently, to neglect this grace of remorse is to lose the favourable opportunity of repenting, to ruin the foundation of your justification, and to tear up by the roots all the fruits of penance.

When Holofernes determined to make himself master of Bethulia, which he besieged, it was not merely by force of arms that he could at last reduce it to extremity, but by turning the waters with which it was supplied into another channel. Now thus it is, that you act against yourselves, and thus it is, that the libertines of the age are mostly damned. Had they seriously attended to the admonitions of their conscience, and turned to advantage the ordinary helps, and this first grace, God Almighty would thereby have found admittance. Nor would he have stopped there: he would have proceeded farther, would have gradually raised a secret disgust of vice in their hearts, and a love of virtue, and would have communicated himself to them a thousand ways. But so long as they suffer him to knock at the door without opening it to him, and to obstruct every passage by which he may come to them, by blocking up that of remorse of conscience, there is no access to him.

And is it not natural that he should give them over, and abandon them to themselves? This, I say, is what makes them lead, to the last gasp, a disorderly life, and what carries them on, almost without fail, to final impenitence.

And, indeed, Christians, is it not a most inordinate way of proceeding, to commit sin, and in the presence of God to accuse one's self of what is most abominable and hateful in sin, and to draw no advantage from the only good that sin can produce, which is remorse of conscience? I have told you that remorse was a grace quite miraculous, for that it takes its rise from sin itself. But is it not true, that the more miraculous it is in its rise the more blameable we are for not yielding to it? God works for you, beloved hearers, a miracle of mercy, by showing you in your sin the grace that should destroy it, and repair all the damage of which it was the cause. But you, by a contrary kind of miracle, I mean a miracle of vice and obstinacy, render this grace fruitless and effectually stop the course of its virtue; as though you had presumed to enter the lists of the omnipotence of God, and, by the malignity of your vitiated heart, to surpass the excess of his love and goodness.

But what conclusion is to be drawn from this? That nothing, as I have shown, being more becoming the majesty of God, or more conformable to his supreme greatness, than the grace I am speaking of, nothing can be more invasive of his rights, or more injurious to him, than the revolt of a vile creature who rejects it—that makes head against it, and uses all his endeavours to put it to flight. For, the more God acts in quality of God, the more culpable I am in not submitting to him, and paying him obedience. Now by these remorses, God behaves to me in quality of master, as he humbles me, disturbs me, frightens me, takes vengeance of me, and makes me see what I am, and all my unworthiness. But I, by resisting these remorses, act perfectly the part of a rebellious subject. Not only I refuse to lend a favourable ear to the remonstrances of my God, but am displeased that he reproves me, and I reject his menaces. Indifferent whether I am a sinner or not, whether I am an agreeable or disagreeable object in his divine sight, whether I deserve his chastisements or rewards, I banish from my mind all these reflections, and entertain none but such as may contribute to my ease and content. Such is the intolerable audacity of the sinner! He flies in the face of the author of his being, and most daringly affronts the supreme arbiter of his eternal lot.

His malignity, however, ends not there, and this is what enhances it: of all graces remorse of sin is the most constant and the most durable; therefore resistance to this remorse implies malignity the most inveterate and the most insurmountable. A certain broacher of heterodox tenets in these later ages vauntingly declared, that, after innumerable hard assaults which he was forced to sustain, he at length had so far got the better of his conscience, and withstood it with such firmness, that he was entirely freed from the inward reproaches which used to worry him. He said so, I own: but it was rather a diabolical vanity than truth. A diabolical vanity did I call it? Was it not something worse? For, the very devils in hell are perpetually and unmercifully racked and torn by remorse of conscience. And since it is not a grace, what can it be but a most cruel torment? Of this our Saviour himself informs us, when he tells us, that "their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched." Mark ix. Nevertheless, Luther, the most headstrong and untractable enemy of the Church, would make us believe, that he had shaken off the yoke, and soared into regions beyond the reach of so importunate a censor. Be that as it may, it is not the subject of the present inquiry. But thence you may judge by what efforts of wickedness, and by what frequent resistance he came at last to be fixed, or to think himself fixed in that hellish disposition.

You ask me, if a sinner can really come to that pitch. I cannot justly say: but I verily believe he cannot. However, if he can, it is the summit of wickedness; and if he doth, it is that abyss of sin, of which Solomon speaks in the Book of Proverbs; neither can the sinner be reduced to a more irremediable and abandoned state, than when he holds in contempt whatever concerns God and conscience: "When the wicked man cometh into the depth of sin, he despiseth." Prov. xviii. Although I do not take upon me to decide whether this can or cannot be, whether this really is or is not the case; yet I dare affirm, that it cannot be the case, without declaring an eternal war against God; without saying to God: you are determined to attack me on every side, and on every side I will resist; you are determined to grant me no respite, and without ceasing I will defend myself; you will make a vigorous impression on me, and I, by making head, and by holding out against you, shall succeed in absolutely repelling you from my heart, of which you are endeavouring to gain possession. This, dear Christians,

we say not expressly, and in so many words, for we should shudder in uttering it, and have a horror of ourselves; but we say it practically and by our deeds, and act upon these detestable principles. This undoubtedly is the state of a soul enthralled by sin, and evidently lost without resource.

What ought more fully to convince us of this, is that which I have laid down as the sixth characteristic of conscientious remorse: an universal grace, and the most common in every condition and in every state. Whereupon I make the following reflection, which will, I think, be allowed to be a solid one: you willingly renounce, dear Christian brother, the most common grace, the most extensive grace, the grace which is never refused the most wicked and ungodly men. You give up this last, this only hope. What then remains for you? Are you not, as it were, in a state of damnation? For, one of the greatest miseries of the damned, is not the being lacerated with remorse of conscience, but the being incapacitated from turning it to advantage; the finding no aid or assistance in it; the having no more of it than the feeling and the pain. Now I agree with you, that as yet you have it in your power to make good use of the remorse that stings you, and that in this behalf your situation is different. But as to the reality and effect of the thing, what matters it, whether or not you have it in your power to make good use of it, if in reality you make no use of it? What matters it, whether or not it depends upon you to draw advantage from it, if in reality you draw none from it. What matters it, whether or not it be a favourable influence of the divine goodness, if in reality you profit not by it?

The malignity of your heart, and your blind resistance are the more criminal, because this grace is of all much the most certain for a sinner, and the least exposed to the wiles and artifices of the lying spirit. St. John, in his first epistle, wrote to his disciples in these words: "Dearly beloved, if our heart reprove us not, let us have confidence." 1 John iii. But without contradicting the apostle's admonition, I say now to you: when your conscience reproaches you, put all your trust and affiance in God, because it is a proof beyond all doubt, that he still thinks of you, and looks on you with an eye of compassion and tenderness: "Dearly beloved, if our hearts reprove us, let us have confidence." These two propositions, seemingly contradictory, are not contraries. For, the apostle discoursed on the affiance of the righteous, which sup-

poses innocence; and I am speaking of the grace of repentance, which is never less liable to be called in question, than when it commences in a Christian soul by remorse of sin. Therefore, sinner, it is for you, the only secure ground, the only ground on which you may stand with entire certainty. But why do you rob yourself of its wholesome effects? Why do you not call to mind St. Bernard's saying: that as remorse, of all graces, is the most secure, so resistance thereto is the most immediate disposition to despair?

Dreadful despair! which that same conscience, the importunities of which you had so often eluded, will increase tenfold at the judgment of God; that conscience, on which you had so often imposed a deadly silence, when it told you your duty against your will, in spite of your inclinations and brutal passions, but yet with a view to bring you anew to life, and bestow on you an eternal life, and wholly divine; that conscience, against which you had conceived the same hatred that Achab had conceived against the prophet Michaes, forasmuch as that minister of the Lord, taking all the freedom which became a man deputed by God, declared to that prince misfortunes which affrighted him, but which he might have avoided by such foreknowledge: "I hate him, (says he,) because he doth not prophecy unto me good, but evil;" (3 Kings xii.;) that conscience, of which the remorse, from this time will be the most irreproachable and the most convincing testimony against you; that conscience, which will bring more perceptibly than ever this remorse to light, in the presence of all the hidden of Adam, and will form, to your shame, and to your undoing, the most afflicting conviction: "Their conscience bearing a witness, and their thoughts accusing, or excusing one another." Rom. ii. As if Almighty God should then say to the reprobate: "Be your own judges; they are your consciences that accuse you: I cannot show cause for your condemnation but from their depositions. A hundred times they obliged you, in your life-time, to own, that you were sinners and deserving of my severest vengeance. I meant by them to recall you from your evil ways. They drew from you, however, but a fruitless acknowledgment. The same they draw from you now after death, not for your conversion, but eternal reprobation. By what means shall I bring you to salvation, now that ye have passed sentence against yourselves? Thus God will silence them, thus will he show his own proceedings equitable. Upon

this account, O Lord, (says the royal prophet,) you call upon consciences to bear witness against men; upon this account you force them to acknowledge to themselves that they have grievously sinned, and that their sinful state admits of no excuse: "To thee only have I sinned, and have done evil before thee." Ps. xxx. It is, O my God, to the intent that your justice may be screened from the smallest colour of blame, and that, however rigorous it may seem against the sinner, nothing can be objected to your determinations: "That thou mayest be justified in thy words, and mayest overcome when thou art judged." Ps. xxx.

The inference, my brethren, from all this is, that therefore we must faithfully correspond with grace, while it is in our power, and yield to it without any longer resistance: I mean, to the grace of remorse of conscience, which is, by a very extraordinary privilege, not only the most forcible to bend the will, but the most powerful to convince the understanding. What did our blessed Saviour say to St. Paul, when on the way to Damascus, he dazzled his eyes with a light from heaven, and thundered in his ears these dreaded words, which brought him to the ground: "Hard it is for thee to kick against the goad." Saul, Saul, (said this God-man,) whither dost thou go, and what dost thou mean by openly declaring thyself the persecutor of my church? Too long hast thou withstood my grace which seeks thee, and too painful will it be henceforward to resist its attractives.

To you, beloved hearers, I address the same words. It is not impossible that many years may be already elapsed since God invited you to return into the holy liberty of his children, and wanted to withdraw you from the slavery in which you were unfortunately engaged. A propensity to evil is interwoven with your nature; but you have at command coercive means in the dictates of conscience. Your heart hath been captivated by a perishable object, and it is no easy matter to shake off your fetters. But how many strokes hath conscience given to that effect? And would it not have gained the desired end if it had been seconded by your endeavours? The senses and the flesh have a prevalence over you; but the anguish of remorse, which pierces your soul, lets you see sufficiently, that the beastly delectation of the senses and the flesh will never satisfy you, and that you will always find in them more bitterness of heart than pleasure. Only be sincere, and you will agree to this. Yes, you will agree, that since the fatal moment when

your passion seduced you, and you paid submission to its tyrannous sway, you have not enjoyed a day of comfort; that if, sometimes, you have been inebriated with this false delight, you paid dearly for it by the regret which ensued, by the grief which you conceived, by the reproaches which you felt, by the fear of divine vengeance with which you were seized—by all the principles and maxims of your faith, which awoke within you. You will agree that this perpetual domestic conflict between passion and conscience; that this uncertainty in which you live, timorous and doubtful whether to renounce your passion or your conscience; that these vicissitudes, these eternal fluctuations of your heart, give themselves a thousand times the lie, and a thousand times contradict themselves—now leaning to this resolution, and now to that, determining nothing—at least persisting in nothing determinate; shunning what it wishes for, and seeking what it hates—for this is the case of innumerable sinners. You will agree, I say, that this is a very afflicting situation; and that, after all, it would cost you incomparably less to follow the voice of conscience, which pressingly solicits you, and to carry, at the expense of all the rest, the holy resolution with which it inspires you into execution! "Hard it is for thee to kick against the goad."

And yet, happy it were for you, if the pains you suffer were the only misfortune. But there is a much more melancholy circumstance still behind. By custom, which daily takes deeper root, conscience, it is true, is not reduced to a total inactivity, but acts not with its primitive force and vigour; so that remorse, at length, makes but slight impressions, and loses almost its whole virtue. For (I have said it, and I say it again) it is what falls out, and what God permits—a tremendous punishment, with which heretofore, he threatened his people by the prophet Ezechiel. You are ever (says the Lord) in opposition to me; and upon the defensive against my grace. But know the punishment which I have in store for you. Temporal afflictions I will not pour on you, neither loss of property, nor bodily sickness: in this manner I chastise my elect and my friends; but ye deserve not such salutary treatment. One chastisement, however, I have in the treasures of my vengeance, more suitable to your unworthiness, and the more mortal, because it will coincide with your desires: "My indignation will rest in you." Ezech. x. How will it rest? Because it will not reproach you at all, or will not do it with the same assiduity,

nor with the same importunity. When it thundered against you, and filled your souls with fright and consternation, it was a forgiving anger; but when it shall seem to subdue and grow calm, it will be anger to reprobation.

Ah! my Lord, we are sinners, and as such, deserve the utmost exertion of your justice. But if you must needs take vengeance of us, let it be not by that more dreadful silence than all your thunder; nor by that more dangerous rest than any disturbance whatever. The chief favour I beg of you, O my God, is, that in this life you would show us no favour that we would not make proper use of. Raise tumults in our consciences, nor suffer them to sink into a supineness from which they would never revive. The royal prophet earnestly beseeched you, that you would not reprove him in your fury, nor chastise him in your anger. That was meant for a very different world from this, and we prefer the same supplication. But reproofs the most sharp and the most grating we shall humbly accept as signal favours. Nature will murmur, will be sorely pained, mortified, grieved—but that blessed grief, which the holy apostle preferred to all the pleasures in the world, will bring us to repentance, and to the joy of the Lord and everlasting happiness.

SERMON XXI.

ON THE LOVE OF GOD.

"*This he spoke of the Spirit, which they who believe in him should receive.*" JOHN vii.

IT was not particularly on the twelve apostles, beloved Christians, but on the faithful in general, that this divine Spirit was to have come down; and as the same faith was to have united us all in the bosom of the same Church, so the same spirit was to have inspired us with courage, and to have replenished us with his graces. The Spirit of Truth (according to the testimony of our blessed Saviour) was sent to teach us all things—but of all he hath taught us, it will be sufficient to have learned one only, inas-

much as to that all the others refer; one, which St. Paul meant to indicate to us by these admirable words: "The love of God is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Ghost." Rom. v. For this spirit of light is, in a special manner, a spirit of love; and when we shall love God, we shall possess the whole science of salvation in the love of him; and, even in this life, shall enter upon that which shall be our occupation and happiness to all eternity.

But is it not amazing, beloved Christians, that although to love God was the end of our creation, we should hitherto, perhaps, know not in what the love of God consists; but that, although subject to the law, we should be ignorant of the first and great precept of the law. It is, therefore, of importance that I give you a clear and exact knowledge of it, which I purpose to do in this discourse. Of all our obligations, it is the most essential; and what the wise man said of the fear of God, I may with equal propriety say of the love of God: "This is all, man." Eccles. xii.

O thou holy Spirit, thou Spirit of Love, come in aid of my zeal; inspire my breast, put words of fire into my mouth—that heavenly fire of which thou art thyself the inexhaustible source; that sacred fire which constitutes the happiness of the blessed in heaven, and of the saints upon earth.

To mitigate the precepts of the law of God, by putting on them constructions and glosses favourable to corrupt nature, is a maxim, Christians, most dangerous in its consequences; but to overstrain these same precepts, and to understand them in a sense too rigid, and beyond the bounds of truth, is an excess to be avoided with equal caution. To say, this is not a sin, when it is so in reality, is a dangerous error, that may terminate in consequences fatal to salvation; but to say, this is a sin, when it is not so in fact, is another kind of error—an error, perhaps, still more prejudicial. Long before our days, have those strongly been opposed, who, by principles too large, would save all mankind; but long before our days have those justly been condemned, who exposed all the world by the severity of their maxims, to fall into despair. Fourteen centuries and upwards are elapsed, since Tertullian reproached the Catholics of his time with relaxation of morals; but fourteen centuries and upwards are elapsed, since Tertullian was reproached with extreme rigour—rigour without bounds; rigour which, at last, plunged him into heresy. We must steer a middle course; and when the point in hand is concerning the reprobation or justi-

fication of a sinner, we must equally avoid partiality and severity, and be wise according to the rules of faith.

Now this I say, Christians, because as I am to treat, in this discourse, on one of the fundamental articles of religion, I would gladly rectify a wrong notion with which you may probably be prepossessed—either, that I should exaggerate, or diminish your obligations. Of these two extremes it imports me to beware; and for that reason, I shall adduce nothing but what is universally received, is evident and incontestable, and is founded on the unshaken basis of faith. I shall no more adhere to the opinion of one, than to the doctrine of another, but shall tread in the footsteps of all divines. I shall not, in preference to the less probable, embrace the more probable. I shall not deem it enough to tell you what is true, but you shall believe what the gospel obliges you to believe. This being supposed, I enter upon my subject, which I shall lay before you in few words. I take it for granted, that the love of God which is commanded, should have three characteristics: one relative to God; another relative to the law of God; a third relative to Christianity, in which we are initiated by the call of God.

First, then, with respect to God; the love of God, is a love of *preference*, and it is the ground-work of it.

Secondly, with respect to the law of God; the love of God is a love of *plenitude*, and it is the extent of it.

Thirdly, with respect to Christianity; the love of God, is a love of *perfection*, and it is the degree of it.

I shall endeavour to throw what light is requisite on these three heads; and I earnestly request that you would favour me, in prosecuting so noble a subject, with uncommon attention.

Part I. It was not without reason, that Christ, explaining, himself, the precept of the love of God, reduced the whole substance of it to these few words: "Thou shalt love the Lord with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul;" (Luke x.;) as (according to an excellent remark of St. Augustin) the one serves to determine the obligation of the other, and as the worship of the mind should be strictly commensurate with that of the heart. To what, in fact, am I bound by this holy and adorable law, "thou shalt love?" Endeavour all you can to comprehend the whole force of it. I am bound (replies the evangelical doctor, St. Thomas) to have for God a love of distinction, a love of singularity—a love

which is suitable only to the Deity: that is, a love, in virtue of which I prefer him to all created things. And this is the tribute, the essential tribute, by which God requires that I render due homage to the sovereignty of his Being, "thou shalt love the Lord." He commands me not absolutely to love him with a love of tenderness and feeling; such feeling and tenderness is not always in my power, much less with a constrained or forced love—it were not honourable for him to be loved in that manner—nor even with a love of fervour to any certain degree: this degree of fervour is beyond my discernment, and God, in condescension to my weakness, is pleased to lay me under no such injunction. But he requires, under pain of everlasting reprobation, that I love him as God, in preference to all that is not God.

Observe, Christians, this term—preference. I mean not a vague and speculative preference, which would only draw me from an acknowledgment that God was superior to all created beings; for in order to that, the supernatural charity of which I speak, would be in no wise requisite, as the devils themselves, who hate Almighty God, have for him, notwithstanding the inveteracy of their hatred, this sentiment of esteem. I mean an active and practical preference; a preference, by which I am sincerely disposed to lose the whole world, rather than consent to lose the grace of God for a single moment. A disposition so requisite, that of all the things which I can desire or possess, were there but one which I possessed or desired at the hazard of incurring God's displeasure: that is, if this act of love, which I form in my heart, at the time I protest to God that I love him, hath not in it virtue sufficiently impulsive to make me break all ties, and forego all connexions which may separate me from him, I must pronounce sentence of condemnation against myself, for having prevaricated with respect to the love of God; I must conclude, that I am far from fulfilling the commandment of the love of God; that, therefore, I am no longer in a state of grace and favour with God; and, consequently, that I walk not in the way which leads to salvation and to God. The reason is this: in loving him, I fail in the most essential condition, which is, of loving him in preference to all things.

And herein, (says St. Chrysostom,) not only God requires not too much, but, if rightly considered, it is not in his power to require less. For, observe, my brethren, (says this holy doctor,) that God commands us to serve him, to honour him, to love him propor-

tionably to what he is, and in a manner that shall distinguish him from what he is not. Is anything more reasonable? A king expects to be served as a king, and why should not God be loved as God? Now this cannot be, unless he be loved preferably to all created things; for he is God by this—that he is above all creatures. And if (to form a chimerical supposition) a creature had wherewithal to conciliate love as much as God, he would cease to be a creature, and would become God. As, therefore, it is true, that if I loved a creature with that love of preference, which, properly speaking, is the sovereign love, I no longer should love him as a creature, but as God; so also it is evident, that if I love God with any other love than this love of preference, this sovereign love, I love him not as God. Now not to love God as God, is to commit a grievous outrage against him; and so far is it from observing his law, that it is perpetrating a crime, which, in the opinion of divines, and in the intention of the perpetrator, hath a direct tendency to the destruction of the Divinity.

This, beloved hearers, God himself hath revealed in a thousand places in the inspired writings, and herein terminates the capital duty of mankind: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart." But in order to develop this material point, and to comprehend it with more exactness and precision, let us consult St. Paul, and give ear to St. Augustin; and let us see, by what this apostle of the Gentiles, and this doctor of the Church, have delivered concerning it, whether we may, this day, bear testimony in our own behalf, and safely conclude that we love God.

There needed a soul well grounded in the faith, to give the defiance in terms so general, and so full of confidence, to all creatures, as did St. Paul, when he said; "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ." Rom. viii. Shall affliction, shall danger, shall persecution, shall famine, shall nakedness, shall the sword, shall violence? Shall injustice and the most barbarous cruelty? No, no: (replies this vessel of election) for certain I am that neither death, nor life, nor greatness, nor abasement, nor poverty, nor riches, nor principalities, nor powers, nor all creatures, shall ever be able to separate us from the love which unites us with our God. Thus spoke this apostolical man. What think ye of it, Christians? Doth he not seem transported with an excess of zeal? And did he not, with a view to give it greater lustre, include in these words the whole perfection of divine love? It is a great

mistake—he expressed no more than the common obligation of loving God. In giving this defiance, and in making answer to it, he spoke not as an apostle, but as one of the faithful: he, indeed, expressed himself by a copious enumeration; but nothing did he say, to which all mankind are not bound in rigour. So that whoever is unable to say as much, "hath no inheritance in the kingdom of God." Ephes. v.

Mind my meaning: for it is just as if each of us should say to himself—and I would that after the apostle's example we were often to say it—well, of all the things which I behold in the universe, and which might be the objects of my ambition or concupiscence, is there one sufficient to make me stagger or recoil, in case I were required to give a convincing proof of the love and fidelity I owe to God? "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Let us come to particulars as well as St. Paul. If I crouched under the bloody lash of persecution, and had it in my power to be delivered therefrom by revenge, permitted according to the world, but condemned by God and the maxims of his gospel, should I purchase my deliverance upon those terms? If I were, by a cruel reverse of fortune, reduced to indigence, wretchedness, and extremity, and had it in my option to wallow in comforts, ease, and affluence, by transgressing the bounds of justice and conscience, should I dare to venture it? If to gain, or to keep, the favour of the greatest prince in the world, I needed only to have for him a criminal complaisance, should I do so, in effect to the prejudice of my duty? If by once transgressing the Christian law, it were no hard matter to arrive at honours, to which I could pretend by no other means, would the desire of rising in the world preponderate? If the way of iniquity, on some desperate occasion, were the only means of saving my life, should I dare not to face the king of terrors? Ah! my brethren, know, that if the love which you imagine you bear your Almighty Maker, be not of a nature intrinsically superior to all this, how ardent and affectionate soever it it may seem, it is the love which God insists upon. And let it be remembered, that it is a great mistake, if placing your confidence in such a love, you conclude it will clear you in the presence of God. You love not God, I do not say with the superabundance of charity which inflamed the breasts of the most righteous men, but in the degree and measure prescribed by the law. The reason is, that this supposed love gives not to God the place which he

ought to take up in your hearts: that is, it doth not place him above a thousand things, which yet should be placed in a much inferior degree of affection. For, granting even the reality of the love which you think you entertain for God, you set still more by your life, by your fortune, by your good name, by your peace of mind, than by the inheritance of God, or, to speak more properly, than by God himself. Whence it follows, that this love is not the love of preference which God requires, and which the law commands: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole mind." Thus it was that the great St. Paul conceived this matter; and how great soever may be the refinement of human reason, it will ever be unable to oppose the evidence of this principle.

But after the apostle, let us hear St. Augustin. This holy doctor, in his accurate Commentaries on the Thirtieth Psalm, makes this proposal to the faithful of his time: "Let your hearts speak, my brethren." At present I shall only interrogate your hearts, not daring to rely on the testimony of your mouths, and being well assured, that in matters regarding the love of God, it is only the heart that hath a right to speak: let your hearts, therefore, speak. If God, at this moment, should make you an offer, to all appearance the most advantageous, and the most capable of filling up the extent of your desires; if he should promise to leave you for ever upon earth, in exuberance of riches, in satiety of honours, and in a capacity to relish all the pleasures of the world; if he should say: I bestow on you all this; you shall be rich, powerful, live comfortably, so that nothing shall be able to disturb or afflict you; and, what you make infinitely greater account of, you shall be exempt from death, nor shall there ever be an end to this human felicity. But then you shall never behold my face, never shall you enter into the kingdom of glory which I have prepared for my elect. I ask you, (says St. Augustin,) if God should speak to you in this manner, would you cheerfully enter upon such a destiny? Would you gladly accept of such an offer? Should it square with your wishes, beloved Christians, it would be an infallible and undeniable token that you had not as yet begun to love God. It is the very conclusion which this father hath drawn; and whence hath he drawn it? From this invariable and fundamental principle, that the love of God should be a love of preference; and this it were

utterly impossible to have, if you consented to be deprived of the fruition of God, in order to enjoy the good things of this life.

But to make a supposition still more natural, and more to the point of the present subject. Figure to yourself the thing in this world to which you cleave with the greatest earnestness, and that is your honour. It is deeply wounded by an atrocious calumny, or an outrageous affront. You have lost all credit and esteem in the world; and such is the nature of your situation in life, that the stain which dishonours you is more insupportable than death itself. Nevertheless, there remains but one way to efface it, and that is a criminal one. It is, however, proposed to you: and if you do not accept it, you fall irretrievably into utter contempt. Hereupon I ask you, beloved hearer: do you love God sufficiently to believe that you would make, on such an occasion, a sacrifice of your resentment to him? Answer me not, that God would then afford you particular succour. The question relates not to the succour which God would then afford you. The point is, to know with what fidelity you use the succour which he now affords you. I ask not what act of love you would form in those circumstances, but what kind of act you now produce; and I desire to know, if it be such in its nature as would calm the tumult which the received injury would raise in your breast? For if that be the case, your hopes are well-founded, and you want no just reason to be satisfied with yourself. But if it be otherwise, the dread and horror of never-ending anguish should overwhelm your heart, because it is destitute of the vivifying charity which operates salvation, and of which the law lays you under a strict obligation, of loving your God preferably to your honour. But is it not hard for a man of the world to have this disposition? Hard or not hard, (replies St. Bernard,) it is the only scale in which you will be weighed; it is the only rule by which God will judge you.

The love of preference will condemn innumerable worldly souls, whose attachment to frail and despicable creatures, induced them to love, adore, and serve them, so as to forget the essential obligation of loving the Creator. No mention shall be made even of some certain shameful passions. The love of preference will condemn innumerable fathers and mothers, whose weakness and ill-judged fondness for their children, will draw upon them the reproach which Almighty God made to the high priest, Heli: "Since you have made greater account of your children than of me,"

(1 Kings, ii.,) I will doom you to perdition. The love of preference will condemn innumerable Christian women, who, for having carried the duty of their state beyond the due bounds, preferred that to God, which they should only love for the sake of God. The love of preference will condemn over-zealous friends, who, regarding friendship as their bounden duty, and, totally addicted to the will of their associates, entered into all their intrigues and undertakings; and, disregarding, or overlooking the pre-eminence of God, became ardent abettors of their injustices and violences.

The love of preference, the first duty of man, and it relates to God. The love of plenitude, the second duty of man, and it respects the law of God, and is the subject of the second part.

Part II. To include in his essence the whole aggregate of beings, is the property of God; and of the love of God, the property is, to reduce to the unity of a single precept all the other precepts, which, however different and infinite in number, are comprised, notwithstanding, in the love of God. "Love," (says St. Augustin,) "and do what thou wilt." It would seem by this, as if the love of God abolished all the other duties of man. But this is wide of that father's meaning, whereas he would give us thereby to understand, that all the other duties of man, being united as they are in the love of God, he may have full liberty to do as he will, provided he love God, because loving God, he is necessitated to do all the other duties incumbent on him, and is incapacitated from desiring what clashes with his duty. This, beloved hearers, is the whole scope of these elevated words delivered by St. Paul: "Therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." Rom. xiii. A point of doctrine which it so much behoves you to understand perfectly. For, in order to produce this act of love which is the subject of the supreme commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord," we must be prepared, or, to speak more properly, determined, by an absolute, sincere, efficacious will, to observe, without reservation, and without exception, all the other commandments; and we must be persuaded, that to love God without this disposition is as impossible as it is to love and not to love at the same time. I say all the commandments without exception: for here, Christians, you should advert to a very material circumstance, which, perhaps, you have never comprehend thoroughly.

There is a wide distance between charity and moral or natural virtues: for I cannot, on fulfilling one precept, say, I have incen-

tive charity; if I fulfil more, I shall have an increase of charity; and when I have fulfilled them all, my charity will be complete. No, the case is quite otherwise. Charity is essentially one and indivisible, taking in and observing every article throughout the whole compass of the law of God. If I called in question (says St. Thomas) a single article of the religion I possess, whatever submission I might have with regard to all the rest, it would be true, notwithstanding, that I had not the least degree of faith, because faith is substantially one and indivisible. In like manner, it is beyond all doubt, that although I had for all the other commandments the submission of will which the law requires, if it fail with regard but of one in particular, it follows that I have not the least degree of the love of God. There is (continues the angelical doctor) a great love; and in a comparative view with this, we may say, that there is a less love; but the love which is less, if true, is extended, as well as the great, to all present, future, and possible obligations whatever. And when St. Paul loved God with that extatic love, which he hath painted in colours so striking and lively, he laid himself under no greater obligation than the least of the righteous who loves God the most feebly, if he love him truly. Upon this account it is, that the apostle denominates this divine love, "the fulfilling of the law;" (Rom. xiii.;) because all the commandments of the love of God coalesce in charity, of which it is composed, as of so many parts, because they concentrate in it, like so many lines, which, although distinguished in their various directions yet terminate and unite in the central point.

And truly among all the particular precepts, considered otherwise than in this centre of divine love, there is no connexion or natural dependance of one upon another. We may observe one, without fulfilling another. That which forbids me to wrong my neighbour, is silent with regard to perjury or adultery. That which commands me to relieve the poor, makes no mention of prayer or penitence. But all this is inseparably connected with the love of God. The reason is, that this love, in virtue of its contents, and what we call its plenitude, is a general prohibition of whatever is repugnant to good order, and a universal injunction of whatever is conformable to right reason. And, accordingly, to speak in the language of divines, if I inwardly protest to God that I love him, I promise to obey his will in all things as much as if I specified each in particular; and, disclosing my heart, I set forth my senti-

ments by this single act, relatively to all that God knows I owe him, or am desirous to do for him. Whereupon St. Augustin makes a judicious reflection, which is to this effect. He examines these words of our blessed Saviour: "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love;" (John xv.;) he draws a comparison between these words and this other passage in the same gospel: "If ye love me, keep my commandments;" (John xix.;) and thus he reasons upon it: Jesus Christ, on one hand, assures us that if we love him, we shall obey his law; and on the other, that if we obey his law, we shall love him. How then! Is charity fulfilled by the law? Or is it by the fulfilling of the law that charity is practised? Do we love God, because we perform that which he commands? Or do we perform that which he commands, because we love him? Ah! my brethren, (replies this holy and incomparable doctor,) let us not at all doubt, that the one and the other are fulfilled according to the oracle and meaning of the Son of God. For, whoever sincerely loves God, hath already fulfilled the whole circle of precepts in the disposition of his heart; and whenever he carries his resolution of fulfilling them into execution, he only ratifies, and confirms by his works, that which he hath already done in affection, and in the recesses of his soul. Whence we may infer, that to produce an act of the love of God, without an absolute will to observe his commandments, is an evident contradiction; for, "love is the fulfilling of the law." Rom. xii.

Suppose then a certain kind of person, of which the depravity of these our times affords numerons instances: I mean a person of limited fidelity, a person who pays submission to the law, but not completely; a person, if you please, who complies with every article of the law, save one: he is neither blasphemer, nor freethinker; neither cheat, nor unjust possessor; neither passionate, nor revengeful; he is regular in his devotions, and upright in his dealings; but his weakness appears from his yielding to a passion which overbears his reason, and which, though the only one that holds him in bondage, is not the less for that the scandal of his life. Or let us consider him in another light: he is chaste and abstemious, regular in his amusements, an enemy to misrule, and a zealous advocate for good order and purity of manners; but, for all his zeal and purity of manners, he cannot bring himself to forgive an injury; for all his regularity, he will not govern his licentious tongue, but lashes his absent neighbour with impunity. I

say that this person hath no more charity, I mean that divine and supernatural charity, that charity on which salvation depends, than a heathen or a publican; and that God, whose discernment, though severe, is just and infallible, dooms him equally to destruction and eternal reprobation, as if he had transgressed every article of the law. The reason is this: by omitting one point, he is deficient in that which is essential to charity; namely, an efficacious and determined will to fulfil every article within the compass of the law.

And in this sense is to be understood that saying of St. James, which in former ages appeared so obscure to the fathers of the Church, and concerning which, St. Augustin himself thought it advisable to take the opinion of St. Jerom: "Whosoever shall offend in one point, is guilty of the whole." James ii. What! (says this father) shall then the transgression of one precept be deemed equally criminal with the transgression of them all? Is it no more wicked to violate them all, than to violate one? Is God indifferent as to this or to that? Is he no more offended by the one than by the other? In that sense, indeed, (replies St. Jerom,) the proposition would be erroneous, and pernicious in its consequences. But in the sense of the apostle, it contains an incontestable tenet of our faith; that whoever acts in a single point, against the law of God, is as much deprived of his saving grace, loses charity as infallibly, hath no more pretension to the inheritance of glory, in a word, is as liable to be eternally damned, as if he had violated it in all parts.

And St. Bernard, ruminating on this doctrine, cries, O my God, I have no reason to complain, as though the obligation which I am under of loving you were too rigorous. For, can anything, on the contrary, be more consentaneous with the rules of equity than this law? And should I not, by condemning it, condemn myself, whereas I pretend, though but a mortal man, to a right of requiring that my friends behave to me with the same faithfulness? Should one of them only make me an ungenerous return in an important affair; should he side with my adversary; should he blast my character; should he affront me by insolent or contumelious language, how irreproachable soever as to everything else he may be in my regard, I strike him out for ever from the list of my friends, and conclude that he is wanting to me even in that common charity which all mankind owe one to another. But he hath only offended me in one point. No matter: it is abundantly suffi-

cient to make me clearly perceive, that I cannot suppose I have a share in his affection; because if he loved me sincerely and solidly, he would ever be careful to give me no mortification, or hurt me in my mind. Thus it is, my God, that I conceive this matter: and if such be my judgment of it in my own case, how shall I judge otherwise, when the question relates to the interests of my Creator and supreme Lord? When I take a step in contravention to your orders, and to the prejudice of your honour, how inoffensive and irreprehensible soever I may be in all other respects, it is not to be wondered at that you should blot me out of the Book of Life, for having prevaricated against the law by which you require that I should love you above all created things.

But to conclude from thence, beloved Christians, that being once sinners, we have no farther measures to keep with our Maker; and that as charity is indivisible, it were as well we should lose it for much as for little, be libertines outright as only by halves; follow the suggestions of all our passions as gratify but one; run the greatest lengths as use restraint, would be an impious and mercenary way of reasoning: impious, inasmuch as by this maxim of all or naught, we should expect to gain credit by our extravagance and libertinism: mercenary, for that we should have but our own satisfaction in view, indifferent as to the degree or measure in which God might be offended. But this, my brethren, (says St. Augustin to his flock,) is a mistaken notion; for although the love of God and charity be convertible, and unsusceptible of division, it is an undoubted truth, that the more you transgress the commandments of God, the more detestable you make yourself in his divine presence—your return to grace becomes the more difficult; you increase the more that treasure of wrath, of which St. Paul speaks, and you should expect to undergo the greater chastisement in a woful eternity. These considerations, if you have any principles of religion left, will be more than sufficient to check the impetuosity of your evil courses.

However, Christians, it cannot be denied, that there is a great deception in the conduct of men with regard to this great precept: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." Luke x. Nothing is more easy than to say, I love God; and yet nothing is less common in practice than this love. We impose upon ourselves by not distinguishing between real and counterfeit love of God. Not only our hypocrisy leads others into error, but we deceive ourselves by volun-

tary blindness. If our soul be but actuated by the slightest sentiment of love for God, instantly we fancy that all is right, and conclude that we have a plenitude of divine love. Natural affection we often mistake for an impulse of grace; and an impulse of grace for the effect of our fidelity. We confound the inspiration which compels us to love, with love itself; and that which Almighty God operates within us, independently of us, we attribute to ourselves, vainly imagining that thereby we have complied with all the obligations which were imposed on us by the supreme Ruler. But, beloved Christians, it is a great mistake: and wo be to us, if either we fall into, or remain in such gross errors. To love God, is to refrain from everything which the law forbids, and to put whatever it commands in practice; it is to war with our passions, and perpetually to deny our perverse appetites; it is to humble our minds, to crucify our flesh, and to crucify it according to St. Paul's monition, with its vices and lusts; it is to resist the delusions and charms of the world, the torrent of custom, and the poisonous influence of bad example; in a word, it is to have a strong desire, and efficacious will to please God in all things, and displease him in nothing. In loving him thus with a love of preference and a love of plenitude, it remains that we love him with a love of perfection, in respect to Christianity, as I am going to set forth in the third part.

Part III. Although Almighty God be at all times the same, and his unchangeable perfections make him unchangeably amiable, it is true, notwithstanding, (as St. Bernard observes,) that according to the various states in which man may be considered, the love he owes God hath manifold degrees; and that in proportion to the gifts and favours he hath received from heaven, the measures of height, of depth, and of breadth, which the apostle of the Gentiles ascribes to charity, must be more or less extended. Now from this principle, which is founded in reason, I make two deductions: first, that the precept of divine love imposes on man much greater obligations in the new law, than it did in the old: secondly, that therefore, the act of divine love ought to be in us, Christians, much more heroical, than it needed to have been in a Jew or a Gentile, before the law of grace. And now, without further preface, I shall enter upon the proof both of the one and of the other.

1st. From the first moment that I become a Christian, it is incumbent on me to love Almighty God in a Christian manner.

Now it is much more to love him in a Christian manner, than in a manner merely human. The reason is this: in loving him, we bind ourselves (besides the eternal and divine law, which is common to us all) to a particular law, of which Christ is the author. Consequently, it is to add an engagement of charity which it originally was void of, and which is, in course of time, become the summit of perfection: "I testify (says St. Paul) to every one who is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law." Gal. v. And I declare to you, Christians, conformably to the words of that great apostle, that so soon as you were engaged to Jesus Christ by baptism, you took upon yourselves a yoke abundantly more holy than that which is prescribed by the law of Moses; a yoke, which you must carry all the days of your life; a yoke, to which your salvation is indispensably annexed; a yoke, without which, God neither will nor can be the object of your love. Ah! beloved hearers, what a train of reflections doth this lead us into! Steadfastly to believe that the law of Christ Jesus is a law of sweetness, a law of grace, a law of liberty, a law of love—is steadfastly to believe what the divine Spirit hath himself revealed, and what the sacred penmen have inculcated in every page of their writings. But to imagine it sweet, because the duties it prescribes are not rigorous, nor contrary to the senses and to corrupt nature; to imagine that its liberty consists in irregularity and looseness of manners, and that it is not a law of abnegation and suffering, would be, I do not say a mistaken notion, but the way to destroy it. No, no; (says Tertullian, setting forth his sentiments upon this head) the liberty which Christ brought down to us from heaven, countenances in no sort, licentiousness of manners. If that God-man put a final period to the sacrifices and ceremonies of the written law, he hath given us in return rules of life more capable of sanctifying our souls; and that which was condemned in the Old Testament by the precept of charity, bears a double criminality, since the God of charity came, himself, to deliver his own doctrine and give us example.

This, beloved Christians, is fixed undeniably on the basis of truth. For how often hath our adorable Saviour declared it in the gospel? How often hath he clearly made us understand, that to embrace his religion, we must renounce the world, and ourselves too, in a much superior and perfect manner than was required by the Jewish legislator? How many much more strict and severe interpretations hath he given to the principal articles of the law of

God? How many dispensations, though not repugnant to the law, hath he abolished? He hath rescued us, it is true, from legal observances; but to many others he hath tied us down? Of that one commandment—that we love our enemies, is not the perfection more eminent and sublime, than of all that was taught and practised by the Pharisees? To how great a degree hath he raised (as I may say) some certain obligations of the law of nature? In how many particular points hath he exerted his supreme power, in order to lay us under new prohibitions? It hath been told your fathers, (so he spoke to the Jews,) that such and such things were not forbidden; but I declare unto you, that those things, supposed then to be allowable, shall no longer be allowed for those who come after them.

Some interpreters, I know, have asserted that the Son of God spoke after that manner, not with a view to improve upon the law, or to add to it in the least, but only to amend the erroneous glosses and explanations of the Scribes and teachers in the synagogue; but I also know, that this opinion hath been canvassed and impugned by most of the fathers. For if our blessed Saviour (as St. Jerom observes) meant only to refute the doctrine of the Pharisees, and not make new precepts, upon what ground could he command them to do good to those from whom they had received evil, to pray for their persecutors, to love their calumniators? Where was this to be found? In what book of the law was such commandment inserted? Is not the contrary clear and evident, as a right of requiting hatred with hatred, and inimical retaliation are authoritatively set down? It is, therefore, undeniable, that Christ intended to outgo Moses, when he told his disciples: "But I say unto you, (that his design was to enact laws of his own,) this is my commandment;" (John xv.;) that what we call the Decalogue is, relatively to us, more perfect than it was with respect to the Jews; and, by a necessary consequence, that to love Almighty God in the Christian religion, greater pains must be taken than was needful before the preaching of the gospel.

This, beloved hearers, is what Tertullian, in his usual style, called "the weight of baptism;" and this is what betrayed him into a way of thinking, which however dissonant from the spirit of the Church, affords matter notwithstanding for an excellent reflection; let it not escape you. He spoke of catechumens who, touched with God's grace, and impatient to be incorporated in the

church of Jesus Christ, earnestly entreated to be cleansed from their sins in the laver of salvation; which, however, it was thought proper sometimes to postpone, in the view of procuring more certain and convincing proofs of their faith. This delay gave them great uneasiness; and Tertullian, on the other side, surprised at the desire they so warmly expressed, expostulated with them, and told them that if they knew what baptism was, they would rather be in dread of it than wish to receive it.

I have told you, Christians, that this doctrine tallied not entirely with the spirit of the Church, as it favoured a fault but too common already—the putting off baptism to the hour of death; in order to live at large, and enjoy the pleasure of an unrestrained licentiousness—a fault which the Church hath never tolerated, esteeming it that as baptism is the first bond which unites us with Christ, and the first sacrament which constitutes us members of his mystical body, it were a crime to deprive one's self of such an advantage, merely upon account of the obligations annexed to it. In this, therefore, as in other respects, Tertullian was misled by presumptuously relying on his own understanding. But, inasmuch as he maintained that baptism was a painful and burdensome engagement, he spoke with propriety. Did not Jesus Christ himself inculcate the same doctrine? And doth he not propose to us his law as a yoke? "Take my yoke upon you." Matt. xi.

If it be urged that there are, among the Christian people, who feel not the incumbrance of this yoke: ah! brother, (replies St. Augustin,) it may really be so, nay, it really is so; but beware of confounding things that ought to be accurately distinguished. For you feel not the weight of the baptismal yoke, either because God supplies you with strength to undergo it, or because you shake it off by a base infidelity. If it be the heavenly unction of grace which makes you not perceive it, blessed be God, I envy your condition, far from making you doubtful concerning it. But, on the contrary, if it be not burdensome, either because you carry it not at all, or because you carry it only by halves; if it be not burdensome, because you suit it to your inclinations, and think you may adapt it to the comforts of life; if it be not burdensome, because you reduce it to a superficial and merely seeming austerity, and take upon you no more of it than just what you like, you have reason to tremble with fear, and be dismayed. For the yoke which you imagine you have shaken off, will one day overwhelm you;

and the duties which you neglect, will be the cause of your condemnation at the judgment of God.

2ndly. From hence we may judge, how generous and forcible ought to be in a Christian the love of his Creator, as it needs must have a virtue proportioned to the holy and rigorous obligations which baptism imposes. I call them obligations, beloved Christians, and not merely and in strict propriety vows; for a vow, (says St. Thomas,) in its proper signification, is a thing which is left to my free option, which God commands not, and without which I might obtain salvation, and arrive at my end. Now the case is otherwise with the obligation of baptism. For whereas, since the rise of the Christian religion, baptism is the only way that leads mankind to salvation; the obligations annexed to it are of absolute necessity; and when I submit to it, whatever obedience I pay to God, I make him not that entirely voluntary sacrifice which a vow expresses. Thus, divines reason upon this matter, not in order to take away from faithful souls the comfort of believing that they are firmly engaged to God by vows, so they allow these vows to be of such a nature, as that God hath not left them to their own disposal; so they own that besides these vows of necessity, there are others of counsel; by which God is honoured in a special manner, and by which men are raised to a greater and more eminent degree of perfection; such are the vows of religion and the priesthood: finally, so they do not unthinkingly countenance, or virtually abet the errors of certain modern heresiarchs, who, to varnish their apostacy in the eyes of the world, perpetually extolled, under colour of reformation, the vow of baptism, to decry that of chastity, which they had shamefully abandoned. But whether we call them obligations or vows, it is undoubtedly true that they add great difficulty to the first commandment, "thou shalt love the Lord;" inasmuch as it is impossible, in the law of grace, to produce an act of divine love, without an absolute will sincerely to fulfil whatever is contained in the profession of Christianity.

I shall proceed a step farther, and shall conclude with a reflection of William of Paris; a reflection worthy of the zeal and piety of that great bishop, but which I should fear communicating to you if I had not reason to depend equally on your piety and understanding. It is this: for an act of divine love to have the character of perfection requisite for salvation, it is not enough that it extend absolutely to all the precepts, whether natural or positive, of the

Christian law, it must farther conditionally take in the counsels. I say conditionally, and pray mind the term; so that if it were necessary, in order to make appear my love of God, to put in practice everything the most grating and mortifying in the evangelic counsels, everything the most humiliating and the most repugnant to natute and self-love, in virtue of this single act, "I love God;" I should be disposed to undertake and to suffer all.

Nor is this, though conditional, a chimerical disposition. Nothing is more real. For, as there is not a gospel counsel which may not, nay, which doth not, in a thousand emergencies, become a commandment, the love of God must put me habitually in the disposition in which it is my duty to be, and inspire me with the resolution which I ought to have, as often as I fall into these conjunctures. Thus, nothing obliges me to withdraw from the world, and betake myself to solitude; but my duty obliges me to be always prepared for both the one and the other; because such might be my weakness, that the world would be for me a rock on which my innocence would split, and that nothing would remain to secure it but solitude. To quit all things for God, is a counsel only, according to the doctrine delivered by our Saviour; but to be ready to quit them, is a rigorous precept, because experience might convince me that I could not retain the possession of them without being attached to them; nor be attached to them without the loss of my soul. God doth not command me to undergo martyrdom; but he commands me to have always a resolution to undergo it; because it is possible, that on some occasion or other, martyrdom might be an indispensable proof of my faith. Hence Tertullian, speaking of the faith of Christians, says that it makes us responsible to God for ourselves, insomuch, that it obligeth us to suffer martyrdom whenever his honour and glory are concerned.

Now this obligation is imposed on you equally by the law of charity. Tell me then, Christians, when the martys were contented, in the days of persecution, to be sacrificed like victims; when they suffered all the rage of fire and faggot; when they were stretched on wheels, and bore the lashes of scorpion-whips; when they underwent patiently, and with invincible courage, for the love of their God, all the rigour of torments, did they perform a work of supererogation, and that could be dispensed with? No: it was necessary according to the law of charity; and had they not acted with all that resolution, and all that courage, God would have

doomed them to reprobation. This the gospel evidently declares: and for that reason, those were rejected from the communion of the faithful who did not resist to the effusion of their blood. No sort of regard was paid to their weakness. So far from it, they were declared apostates, and cut off as members unworthy of Christ Jesus. The martyrs who triumphed over the cruelty of executioners were extolled for having done their duty, and no more. If a recreant fear had made them yield the palm, instead of loading them with her benedictions, the Church would have struck them with the thunder of her anathemas.

How! Is then the commandment of loving God in that extreme degree of strictness? Yes, beloved hearers; and if it surprise us, it is owing to our not as yet knowing God, or not taking care to measure the perfection of divine love by the laws of the world; for we pride ourselves in the like fidelity with regard to our king and country. It is looked upon among men as a duty to be in readiness to die for men; and this is dignified with that towering appelation—a point of honour. Every day we see the wise ones of this world, from similar motives, sacrificing their rest, their health, and their lives; and because in all this they have for the most part only interested views—they are martyrs to the world. Tell me then, why should it seem strange that God should require a return, not inferior from those who love him? Why should it seem strange, that as the world hath its martyrs, charity should have hers?

Nevertheless, Christians, were we legally required to give to God this testimony of our love, should we be disposed to do it? If, at the moment I speak, we were reduced to this alternative, either to renounce him or to die, would many of us become martyrs? Excuse me, Christians, from answering to an interrogatory, which would expose me to the danger of being too forward, either in presuming on your constancy or diffiding in your weakness. What I know, my brethren, and what I learn from theology, is this: that if our breasts be actuated with that love which is the great commandment of the law, without other preparation of heart or understanding, we are fully disposed to become martyrs to our God; and that if there be anything in our disposition which would hinder us from becoming martyrs to our God, whatever feelings we may otherwise have for him, we have not as yet that love which the law expressly commands. Some say that it is dangerous to make these dangerous suppositions: and I hold it, on the con-

trary, that these suppositions are of infinite utility: in the first place, to impress us with an enlarged idea of the excellence and greatness of the God whom we serve; in the next, to inspire our minds with noble and generous sentiments, as often as we are bound to obey his commands; lastly, to humble us, and put us to confusion, whenever we fail in certain easy and common duties, since charity lays on us such great injunctions.

But these suppositions, formed in the imagination in a lively manner, may lead to despair. Yes, Christians, they may; but in whom? Those who put their trust in their own strength, not those who depend upon the force of grace; since nothing, on the contrary, is fitter to awaken and animate our hope than the greatness and difficulty of this commandment. For, it is enough for me to know, that God obliges me to it, and that it infinitely surpasses whatever I can do of my natural power, to be assured that God, who is observant of his promise, will infallibly supply me with aid proportionable to what he commands. And this is the stay that upholds Christian hope; whereas smaller precepts, on account of their facility, are but too often productive of presumption.

Ah! my brethren, I now conceive whence arises the efficacy, or rather the omnipotence of divine charity. When I was told, heretofore, that there needed but an act of the love of God to blot out all sin; when I heard the example of Magdalen adduced, who had expiated by this one internal act all the wickedness of her life; when the authority of the fathers of the Church was quoted, who unanimously assert, that this act, if sincere, hath virtue to justify the sinner, adequate to martyrdom: though I assented to this doctrine, because authorized by faith, I could hardly relish it, because I was unable to enter into the nature and spirit of it. But now, my God, it gives me no surprise: for, it is but reasonable, that as our love of you is a disposition to martyrdom, it should include a power and virtue equal to that of martyrdom; and that as it comprises all the promises and obligations inherent in baptism, it should sanctify and purify the soul by baptism.

But, if this be true, beloved Christians, and if all I have said be requisite to produce an act of divine love, where is the man that truly loves God. This is a secret of predestination which we ought to beware of examining too narrowly. Almighty God hath predestinated some, and knows them. Let not the number, whether great or small, give us any uneasiness; but let us use our

endeavours, as far as we are able, to be one day associated with that blessed host. The apostle of the Gentiles would often lay himself prostrate before the Father of mercies, to beg and beseech he would give him the supereminent science of his love. Let us prefer the same prayer, and ask of him this science, which, among all sciences, holds the first place. Let us say with St. Augustin: "Ah! my Lord, I have known you too late." I say it to my shame, and own it to my sorrow, that in the course of my life, I have not, perhaps, formed one act of perfectly divine love. And how should I form it, O my God, inasmuch as I knew not in what it consisted, or what it included? But now that by instruction I am come to the knowledge of it, I am determined to love you in the fulness of my heart, to love you with all the powers of my soul. I am determined to love you in the manner I ought, and as you require it. I am determined to love you with a love of preference, with a love of plenitude, with a love of perfection.

Do this Christians, and you shall live. After loving God in time, you shall love and possess him in a blessed eternity.

SERMON XXII.

ON PENANCE.

"*He came into all the country round about Jordan, preaching the baptism of penance unto the remission of sins.*" LUKE ii.

How bad soever, beloved Christians, may be the condition of mankind in the state of sin, if all repentance of sin were true, and if true and false penitence were distinguishable on all occasions, the sinner might have comfort in his very misfortune, and might look upon his sin as an infallible resource, and secure ground for tranquillity and peace. What renders his case (according to St. Chrysostom) deplorable is, that although to be sure of the reality of sin, the validity of his penitence must always remain absolutely doubtful; that this very penitence, or what he calls his penitence, ought oftentimes as much as the sin itself to disturb his mind; that all the oracles of the scripture declare we cannot be

saved but by true penance; and that a thousand others, false and shadowy, imperfect and insufficient are productive of damnation. Should he happen to deceive himself, and for want of discernment in the practice of penance, take falsehood for truth, thinking that sufficient which proves ineffectual, he falls into as deep and dangerous an abyss as the most unfortunate sinners; because that which should have been his justification and salvation, becomes a partial cause of his damnation and ruin. And this, if he rightly understands his religion, ought to make him tremble.

Would you set your consciences, dear Christians, as much at ease as possible on so important a head? And would you, to that end, know what true penitence is; or, rather, in what consists the discernment, by which you may know what is true penance? This is what I am going to set forth and enlarge upon in the present discourse, the whole scope of which I shall give you in a few words.

That I call true and secure penance, which the holy precursor, St. John the Baptist, preached to the people who came to seek him in the wilderness, when he said: "Bring forth fruits worthy of penance." Matt. iii. He was not content that they should barely repent, but farther insisted, that they should judge of their penitence by the fruits thereof. For, penitence is not solid, nor acceptable to God, but as it is efficacious; and can it in reason be deemed efficacious otherwise than by the fruit it produces? "Bring forth fruits worthy of penance." These fruits I reduce to three; and I say with all the fathers of the Church, that efficacious penance,

First, generously removes the cause and matter of sin:

Secondly, repairs fully the effects and consequences of sin:

Thirdly, makes the sinner submit faithfully to the remedies for sin.

These three characteristics make up, on one hand, the perfection of penance; and give, on the other, a moral certainty to the penitent sinner. If, beloved hearers, they accompany your penitence, you may rely upon it without rashness or presumption; but should one of them be wanting, it is utterly unprofitable, not to say criminal.

Replenish, O Lord, our hearts with thy spirit, that spirit of zeal which fired the breast of St. John the Baptist: this I beg for myself: that spirit of compunction which feelingly touched the

hearts of the Jews, and disposed them to profit by the great verities which that faithful minister announced to them: this I beg, not only for myself, but for all those who hear my words.

Part I. My first proposition I ground on two incontestable principles, of which, if we have been at all careful to study our disposition or the motions of our heart, our own experience is sufficient to convince us. For, how corrupt soever, (as St. Augustin observes,) what by the fall of the first man, and our own transgressions, our nature may be, we do not love sin, considered as such. None but the devils have those dispositions, if even the devils have; for, it is a matter of doubt, whether they carry their obstinacy and malice to that pitch. We are pleased with the matter and cause of sin, but not, at bottom, with sin itself: that is, we take pleasure in what God forbids, but not because it is forbidden by him. We desire the profit arising from usury, which is to act unjustly; but the profit, not the injustice, is the object of our desire. We love revenge, which is repugnant to the law of God, because we imagine our honour is engaged; but not because it is repugnant to the law.

Further: we would separate, if possible, the one from the other. We would have what we like (an abstraction the libertine would gladly admit of) to be quite unconnected with God's prohibition. We would have the Almighty to be not offended at the pleasure we take in gratifying our passions. In a word, we would give way, without sinning, to our perverse appetites. But as these are inseparable, and as in the conjuncture in which I now suppose the sinner, the vehement desire of indulging the senses overrules the fear of offending the Deity: hence, (says St. Augustin,) though he loves not the sin, though he hath it in abhorrence, he sins notwithstanding, by admitting complacency. The reason is, that he loves what he knows, what he cannot but know to be the cause of sin, or the matter of sin. Now this is enough, whether he will or not, to make him a trangressor against the law of God, and a prevaricator.

This is the first principle: and, observe, Christians, that it is not precisely by the hatred of sin, considered as such, that we ought to distinguish between reformed sinners and those who are not; a hatred the most obdurate still preserve, or at least may preserve, if they have any the least traces of religion left. It is not, I say, by this general rule, this speculative hatred that we must

frame our notions of the fruits of penance, as that kind of hatred, it is well known, gives the sinner no trouble; a hatred common to empty and fruitless, as well as to solid and efficacious penance.

But how shall we begin to discern in ourselves this true penitence, and what I here call a sincere and efficacious detestation of sin? Hearken, Christians, and judge by this practical induction. By actually and effectually cutting off whatever we discover in ourselves to be the cause of sin, or fomenting and nourishing that body of sin, (Rom. vi.,) which God, at our conversion, wills us to destroy. By relinquishing a thousand agreeable things, the carnal man's delight, but which, for that reason, are incentives to evil, and poison to the soul. By declining those objects that excite in the heart pernicious desires, which, according to the scripture, "when concupiscence conceiveth, it bringeth forth sin." James i. By a scrupulous carefulness of avoiding conversations, of which we know how the baneful licentiousness corrupts and enfeebles purity of manners, as they give occasion to the first wounds, and not infrequently the most incurable, that sin inflicts. By a severe, salutary, necessary resolution of giving up such intercourses, as we know by experience, are the bonds of sin: exhibitions and spectacles, the effect of which is, to stir up in the heart the most lively passions, and to diffuse in the imagination the most dangerous ideas, the seeds of immorality: assemblies and routs, in which the spirit of impurity reigns, and can lay inevitable snares for innocence; romances and novels, by which our curiosity is so justly punished by the malignant impression they leave behind. By an unreserved sacrifice of those friendships, the unfortunate tenderness of which we perceive, although covered with a veil of modesty, is nothing in reality but vice in disguise. By a speedy and eternal separation from the person, whose subtile artifices, as well as charms, are fatal allurements to sinful courses. By a holy violence which every one of us is bound to offer himself on all these heads, as, according to the apostle, they are "instruments of iniquity to sin." In a word, by that evangelical circumcision, which stops not at outward show and alterations, but searches the inmost recesses of the heart, and destroys radically every efficient of sin it meets with.

Thus the sinner must judge of the virtue and efficacy of his penance; and thus, whenever he is under a necessity of approaching that sacrament which Christ hath instituted for the reconci

liation of sinners, he must think of fulfilling the precept of the scripture: "Let a man prove himself," (1 Cor. xv.) and as much as may be in this life, secure his salvation. Now this he may do (according to St. Chrysostom) by following the documents here laid down; and I add, that it is only by following them he can do it.

"Take away words, and return to the Lord." Osea xiv. Thus spoke the prophets, exhorting the people of Israel to repentance; and this, O sinner, to whom I address myself, this is the duty my ministry obliges me, this day, to discharge. You say you detest, you renounce your sin; and what you say, you believe to be true. Perhaps you deceive yourself in the testimony you bear in your own favour, and your hearty contrition in the presence of God, is just the reverse of what you imagine. Perhaps the dishonour accruing from sin affects you more than its real malignity; the remorse and uneasiness it creates in your mind, than the atrocious injury done to your Maker; the trouble and embarrassment into which it throws you, than the wrath of God which it draws upon you: if so, your contrition is human. Perhaps your mistake proceeds from this, that you confound the grace of penitence which is in you, with penance itself, of which you have no share, and the desire of conversion with which God inspires you with conversion itself, from which you are far distant: if so, your contrition is not real. But you wish to be delivered from this uncertainty; would you know the internal state of your soul: "Take away words," always equivocal, always ambiguous. I shall lay down the rule by which you may steer your course with safety through the storms of life and billows of temptation. Let us then discuss the point minutely: I shall advance nothing unbecoming the subject, nothing beneath the dignity of the pulpit.

You are a man of the world, a man distinguished by your illustrious birth; but your affairs (a case at this day but too common) are fallen into a distracted and confused situation: whether by your fault or by your misfortune, is not material. Thus circumstanced, what precipitates you into a thousand sins, is living beyond the extent of your income, instigated by vanity and the apprehension of appearing to decline in fortune. Hence numberless injustices: hard-heartedness to your creditors, to the industrious tradesman at whose expense you live, to the poor mechanic whom you keep in misery, to the faithful servant whose wages you detain. Hence these frivolous and deceitful promises, that abuse of your

credit, those shifts to put off, or elude payment. Hence that continual load of debts, which, by ruining the creditor, damn the debtor. Retrench these expenses: and if you would convince me of an unfeigned contrition, as your estate is but small, be a good economist, and live within compass. Let not what you are, but what you can do, be the rule of your conduct. Put away that costliness of attire, that superfluity of retinue, that ostentation of carriages, that excessive delicacy in the choice of furniture. Reduced to poverty and extreme indigence, undergo your distresses with Christian fortitude; bear patiently the rod of divine correction, and convert your necessity into virtue and merit. It is needless, otherwise, to deplore your iniquity; it is needless to repent, or rather to make a show of a fruitless repentance—a repentance consisting of words only, though deeds be required, and that we "take away words and return to the Lord."

You are fond of gaming, which ruins your conscience; gaming without rule, measure or limitation; gaming, no longer your diversion intended to unbend the mind, but your business, your trade, your inclination, your passion; gaming of which we may literally say, "deep calleth on deep:" for thence an infinity of sin proceed, as forgetfulness of your duty, irregularity in your family, pernicious example given to your children, squandering your fortune, knavish tricks, rage and despair. Put an end to this practice; and as it is much easier to renounce it utterly, than to pursue it with moderation, make a public declaration of the resolution you have taken; give God, by laying the axe to the root, an undeniable proof that your contrition is sincere; and in order to convince yourself that you are steadfastly resolved to refrain from sin, lay it down as a rule, from which no persuasion shall induce you to swerve, that you will never game more. In any other supposition, you may cry out to no purpose with the publican in the gospel—Lord, be propitious unto me a sinner, I acknowledge my crime. Your voice is the voice of Jacob, but your hands are hands of Esau. "Take away words and return unto the Lord."

In fine, sift your conscience, without prepossession, in the presence of God, and find out, by a strict and minute examination, the incentive to sin; but find it out prepared, and fully resolved, to make a thorough holocaust, excepting or retaining no part of the sacrifice. By these means you will know if you are truly penitent. Attack sin, not in idea, but in very deed, sapping its foun-

dation, and destroying its superstructure. This St. Paul calls running, not a hazard, but with a determined view of arriving at the goal; this he calls fighting, not at random, nor by beating the air, but by pursuing the enemy, and felling him to the ground: "I so run," says he, "as not to hazard; I so fight, as not to beat the air." 1 Cor. ix. Proceed we to the other principle.

Our thoughts and the first motions of the heart are not always at command; but we are always responsible for our actions and our conduct. And when, on some dangerous occasion, we yield to temptation, from which we were bound by the law to retire, but in which, notwithstanding, we wilfully persisted, we have no right to say, we could not; but would not manfully make head against the enemy.

A sinner, I own, beloved Christians, may be thoroughly converted, and yet be liable to some weaknesses, and may bewail his misfortune for the same reason, and in the same spirit that the great apostle did, and like him say: "I feel another law in my members, repugnant to the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity unto the law of sin." But, observe, (says St. Chrysostom,) that when he spoke in that manner, he at the same time protested, that he was "not conscious to himself of anything;" (1 Cor. iv.;) that he was faithful to grace: that he walked in the dangerous way of salvation with fear and trembling; and that "he chastised his body and brought it into servitude." 1 Cor. ix. Now this declaration of his faithfulness, vigilance, austerity of life and attention to himself, secured him from delusion, when he complained that his passions rebelled against him, and he grieved to be reduced to so mortifying a situation. But the method of hypocrisy is, to complain of weakness, and yet encounter temptation, to resist which all the strength and virtue of the saints themselves would scarce be sufficient. The method of hypocrisy is, to lament the violent attacks of passion, and yet rush into dangers blindly and inconsiderately, in which passions the most moderate are hardly governable. The method of hypocrisy is, to cry, "O unhappy man that I am," (Rom. vii.,) born so sensual and so frail! and to seek, notwithstanding this open acknowledgment, occasions of sinning against God's command, in which human frailty, from a mere misfortune, becomes a crime, or at least the original of all crimes. Such is the nature of penitential hypocrisy: and this is the judgment you ought to form of it.

You are weak, I grant: the law of sin prevails in you; concupiscence rules you; you carry with you your enemy, which is your flesh. But I hold, for that reason, that you trifle with God, if, while you lament your sinful state, you try not to remove the occasion of sin; and that you lie to the Holy Ghost, and that there is in your penitence an enormous contradiction—if, on one hand, knowing yourself weak, you are not, on the other, more watchful and circumspect. For with what face can you say, like David, sighing and weeping, "I have sinned against the Lord," (1 Kings, xii.,) whilst you obstinately persist in proximate danger, and hazarding thereby both your conscience and salvation, without other offence, are guilty of sin against God and yourself? How can you allege the infirmity of your soul, as a motive to deprecate the wrath of God, while to that infirmity of soul you join infidelity and malignity? Yes, I say infidelity and malignity: to beseech the Almighty to cure your illness, and not seek preservation against that which destroys you; to acknowledge your illness, and act as though you enjoyed a state of perfect health; to call upon heaven to testify your anguish, and never to resolve, in virtue of that anguish, to sacrifice anything, or remit of anything. What would you by this? Would you not impose upon God and man?

No, no, beloved hearers, while you act in this manner, your penitence being made up of dissimulation and falsehood, you cannot apply these plaintive words, like St. Paul, to yourself: "I do not the good which I would, but the evil which I hate, that I do." For whereas St. Paul was inconsolable to find, that he did not the good which he wished to do, nor avoided the evil which he wished to avoid, you run precipitate into the other extreme, and avoid the good which you like to avoid, and perform the evil which you like to perform. The efficacy, therefore, of penance, consists in generously quitting the occasion of sin, in order to overcome it; and not attempting to overcome it, by sluggishly remaining in the occasion of it. And here it were needful to have all the zeal and spirit of the prophet, to put the hardened sinner to confusion.

For such, in these times, is the decay of morals, that a confessor shall be treated as difficult and scrupulous, forbidding and unqualified, that shall suspend those who voluntarily persist in certain dangers, from the grace of absolution. But what more evident proof can be given of the bad disposition with which the man of

the world approaches the penitential tribunal, than that he is determined, at all events, to return again to the same company and to the same places, in which his innocence hath so often suffered shipwreck? If ever he ought to exert the power conferred on him of binding consciences, is it not now? He sees, and so do you, that the detestable continuance of so many relapses turns on one circumstance, from which no intreaty can induce you to forbear. Yet should he consent to pronounce the form of absolution over you, far from approving of, ought you not to be offended at his weak condescension? Would it not be diabolically perverting, instead of holily dispensing, God's sacred mysteries?

God forbid, Christians, that I should pretend to authorize the severity which hath oftentimes, perhaps without grounds, been imputed to some ministers of the Lord in the administration of penance. But God forbid, likewise, that I should ever countenance the criminal and dangerous acquiescence of others in that divine tribunal. Now can anything be more dangerous, anything more criminal, than to permit a sinner to participate of the sacraments, who is obstinately bent upon remaining in the occasion of so many relapses? But if we may believe you, they are occasions which it is not in your power to quit; and I say they are occasions which you would readily quit, if the making of your fortune depended thereon, or if some temporal affair, which you chance to have in hand, might be brought thereby to the wished for issue. But, say you, they are ties which cannot be broken without noise and scandal. To this I answer: the great scandal is, that you do not break them; I say, admitting that such allegation is founded in truth, it were better to bear with the salutary scandal which should put a stop to sin, and save your soul, than keep up and foment the mortal scandal which brings ruin upon you, and which is itself an additional sin.

But God will afford me his divine protection, and it is in him alone I place this confidence. An accursed confidence, (says St. Chrysostom,) the sole end of which is, to tempt the Almighty and give man a handle to persist in impenitence. Ah! my God, that this doctrine is not eternally preached! that it is not preached in season and out of season! that it is not preached in all places and to all people, as upon it depends the conversion, the reformation, the sanctification, and the happiness of the Christian world! Be that as it may, beloved hearers, place not an entire reliance on your

penitence; and though it should be, seemingly, ever so fervent, esteem it as unavailing, if it only retrench the matter and cause, and proceed not to repair the effects and consequences of sin, as I now shall make appear in the second part.

PART II. As sacramental penitence is an act of justice, and as the fathers of the Church have always represented it as implying in the sinner a sincere will to do justice to himself, to his neighbour, and to God, it is a natural inference, that one of its principal functions is to repair the effects and consequences of sin. Here, then, beloved hearers, supposing the incontestable and indispensable necessity of this reparation, we are to comprehend it thoroughly and in its full extent, as it is the only rule by which a rational and exact judgment may be formed of penance. For this purpose, I shall adhere to two important maxims of Holy Writ, that must reform two visible and dangerous abuses which we are liable to fall into at the very time we are planning our conversion. This doctrine is of great moment; and I earnestly request you would turn it to advantage.

The first maxim: to be efficaciously converted, it is not sufficient barely to repent; we must bring forth fruits worthy of penance. This is what St. John the Baptist teaches, a man deputed by God himself to prepare for the Lord a perfect people. This is the instruction he gave those Jews who came to hear him in the wilderness, and presented themselves to him with a view to be baptized. This was his inference, when, replete with the spirit of Elias, he bid them "bring forth fruits worthy of penance." For (as St. Gregory, pope, observes) this divine harbinger thereby declared, that penance and its fruits (as a tree and its fruits) were distinct things; that, not content with earnestly bewailing antecedent offences, it entered upon measures of avoiding future ones; that to bewail offences, and even to renounce them for the remainder of life, is only the root, but grace and salvation the fruits of penance, which should it not bear, it is exposed to malediction. By these means he worthily fulfilled his ministry, teaching the obdurate sinner to do penance, and the penitent sinner to "bring forth fruits worthy of penance."

Now which are these salutary fruits of penance? To repair the pernicious effects of sin by contrary works, according to the specific differences thereof. My meaning is this: to repair, for instance, the effects of unjust possession, by restitution; of detraction and

calumny, by retrieving your neighbour's honour and reputation; of passion and outrage, by making humble satisfaction; of enmity and hatred, by a sincere reconciliation. These (says St. Gregory) are the worthy fruits, the proportional fruits, the necessary fruits, the unsuspected fruits of penance. They are all essential, and must be severally elucidated.

Worthy fruits of penance: because the sinner, to produce them, must use such efforts as true, I mean supernatural, nay, the most supernatural penance is capable of. What other motive can induce the rich miser to restore that which, by fraud or oppression, he hath acquired or withholden, and of which he cannot give up the possession without losing his place, or sinking in credit; and the restoring of which becomes, by that means, more afflicting and insupportable than death itself? What other motive can induce the haughty disdainful man to take mortifying steps, in order to satisfy, at the expense of his pride, those whom he hath offended? And should himself be offended, what other motive can induce him to stifle his rage and resentment, and be cordially reconciled with his most mortal enemy? This must be the work, O Lord, of your hand; the strength of man is unequal to such great and extraordinary changes. Your grace must assist him—your most powerful grace. By that he must conceive, by that bring forth these heroic resolutions, which otherwise the corrupt spirit of the world would render abortive. It is by grace, O God, that you subdue the most rebellious and obstinate hearts; that fierce and violent spirits relent, and that the most untractable become mild as lambs; that the unjust possessor gives up his pretensions to another's right, and to his own right too, conferring, like Zacheus, on the injured party fourfold. And if, O Lord, you give a blessing to my words—words which are your own, we shall see by the effects of this victorious penance unexpected miracles, for which your servants will offer up their acts of thanksgiving and gratitude, and which will give greater edification to your church, than the very miracles by which she was established. Then shall we see injustices repaired, calumnies retracted, enmities extinguished, hearts reunited. Worthy fruits these, of which the Holy Ghost himself is the author, and which are styled by St. Paul, "the fruit of light in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth." Ephes. v.

Proportional fruits: to what? To the offence. Otherwise penitence is not only defective, but hateful; not only reprobated by

the Deity, but condemned by the world; for the world still requires proportion in this case. You have grown rich at the expense of the widow and the orphan, and think yourself clear of all obligation by some good works from which no advantage can possibly accrue to the widow and the orphan. You have traduced your neighbour, and wounded his reputation, and think it sufficient atonement to fulfil in his regard the mere obligations of common charity. You have formed devices, and run into exaggerations, to ruin your enemy, and your penitence terminates in weeping and praying in the presence of God. Execrable prayers! says the wise man. And I say, applying the same expression to the present subject, execrable penitence! for that the penitent, in the very act of penitence, will not hearken to the Almighty and obey his laws. The same reason is given for it by the divine Spirit: "He that turneth away his ears from hearing the law, his prayer shall be held in execration." Prov. xxi. No, no, beloved hearers; according to the inviolable and indispensable order which God hath established, defamation can never be repaired by prayer, nor injustice by alms-deeds. To have the merit, before God, of efficacious penitence, we must strictly obeserve the proportions prescribed by the divine law; and instead of conforming our penitence to our fancy, or even to our devotion, we are obliged to conform both penitence and devotion to the rules and dictates of an upright conscience. Now an upright conscience will never allow us to give to God alone what we have defrauded our neighbour of, nor to apply to charity what we owe to justice? To God, (it will say,) the things that are God's, and to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's. This is the law, the eternal law, the invariable law, which it obliges us to follow.

Necessary fruits: for in vain should we wring and rack our imagination to find out expedients, explications, and subterfuges; we must come, at last, to St. Augustin's decision; a decision, against which neither the immoderate desires, nor the looseness of morals, nor the corrupt and evil practices of the times, will ever get prescription. If, when in your power, you refuse to restore that which leans heavily and reasonably on your conscience, making show of a contrite and penitent heart, you may seem, indeed, to do penance, but you do it not. The sin is not pardoned, but on this condition—that damage be repaired. Now if this be true with regard to property, it is equally so with regard to reputation. Go then, if you will; go, lay yourself prostrate at the feet of the priest;

confess your injustice; pour forth floods of tears; if you take not due measures to make suitable amends for the damage you have done by false suppositions, or unjust animadversions—by the malice of your heart, or the indiscretion of your tongue, what is your penance? A phantom, and nothing else. A phantom, did I say? It is a crime, it is a sacrilege.

Certain and unsuspected fruits: there can be no doubt that a sinner, who submits to this reparation, is solidly converted. It is a pledge which the most rigid censors, I mean the most severe confessors, have no right to call in question. With the other fruits of penance, ostentation or hypocrisy may be blended imperceptibly. But there is no fear, in this case, of either the one or the other. What man (supposing his conversion fictitious) would undergo the mortification of giving back what he might keep, or of retracting what he had rashly and falsely advanced? He must be effectually converted, to condemn himself so rigorously, without favour or forgiveness. The efficacy of his penance cannot then be doubted, not that he can be thoroughly assured of his estate. No one (says the wise man) knoweth whether he be deserving of love or hatred. It is one of those secrets which God hath been pleased to reserve to himself, to make us live in a more absolute dependance on his grace. But of all the signs by which we may distinguish true penance, the most infallible, indisputably, is the reparation of the effects and consequences of sin; a reparation, which leaves a calm tranquillity in the soul, that blunts the piercing stings of conscience, and that brings the blessed peace, in which (according to Tertullian) consists the felicity of a justified sinner: "Bring forth [therefore] fruits worthy of penance."

But, beloved Christians, what is the delusion of these times? Instead of judging of penance by its fruits, which would stand the test, we judge of it by practices in themselves equivocal, which often carry with them more of show than solidity. We would have sinners, as of old, be humbled in ashes, covered with rough hair-cloth, and extenuated with fasting. A very captivating, but deceitful outside, if the natural right of charity and justice be not satisfied! It is expected that the discipline which the church of God hath in process of time thought proper to mitigate, will be strictly adhered to. I would to God it were! but on this capital and essential condition—that the fundamental laws, which neither

the church nor God hath ever dispensed with, be strictly observed. This, however, is never thought of—that is, in the true Pharisaical spirit, we keep floating on the surface, but never dive, which we should do, to the bottom.

The second scriptural maxim: "We forecast says (St. Paul) that which may be good, not only before God, but also before men." 2 Cor. viii. And I say, by the same rule, it is not enough that the sinner do penance in the sight of God; he must do it likewise in the sight of men. He doth it before God, by acknowledging his fault; but he doth it before men, by taking away the very appearance of sin. Otherwise—(and it is the decision of St. Thomas, and of all other divines)—otherwise his penitence is ineffectual and null.

I wish I had it in my power, beloved hearers, to convey this doctrine to you in its full extent and full force! The scandal of sin must be repaired by penance. For, wo be to us, should we fall into the error of those broachers of heterodox tenets, who, under the insidious cloak of reformation, corrupt the law, and reduce all penance to sinning no more! Wo be to us, should we falsely imagine, that the mystery of justification is comprised in the words of our blessed Saviour not rightly understood, when he said to the adulteress, "Go, and now sin no more." John viii. For, according to that, it were sufficient for the unrighteous man to say: "I have relinquished my sin;" more vain, perhaps, (St. Gregory observes,) at the testimony he bears to his sinning no more, than humble at the remembrance of his having often sinned; or feasting in the sweets of self-complacency at the ceasing of his sin, and laying claim to the unspotted innocence of the righteous, without participating, in the least degree, of the humiliation of sinners. But the scandal (says this great pope and doctor) is a part of the sin; for which, if no reparation be made, though the sin itself cease, or to speak more clearly, though you cease to commit it, it is not entirely and absolutely destroyed. Penitence, therefore, having regulated the one, must apply to the other; and as it cannot do this, but at the sinner's expense, it must, if efficacious, (according to St. Augustin,) blot out and annihilate sin in his person, and in order to that, must put him to confusion. Otherwise, (continues this holy father,) what example, what edification would you give your neighbour? And if it be true that your sin was attended with these consequences that you so much lament; if by going astray yourself, you

have led others astray, is it not agreeable to right reason that you should, as much as in you lies, be instrumental in reclaiming them? Is it not according to the rules of justice, that as you have scandalized them by a loose conduct, you should try to edify them by a penitential life?

This, however, is not the usual way of reasoning among mankind. And is not the world overrun with persons who judge according to the desires of their heart, and who think it prudent, in the teeth of all the oracles of heaven, to reserve to themselves, in the very state of their supposed repentance, whatever they can of their former follies, and whatever may conduce to foment and flatter their self-love; the pleasures of converse, the splendor of prosperity, the pomp and peageantry of wordly vanity; in a word, all the external concomitants of sin? Who, not content to appear what they were, and by consequence, to be so in every deed, as the appearance of sin hath a necessary connexion with the grounds of sin: I say, not content to keep up externally the same conduct and train of life, would fain persuade themselves, that in this they proceed upon solid principles, and according to the dictates of right reason? Now it is to these prejudiced and deluded souls that I wish to be of service on this occasion, by representing the consequences of their errors to them in a clear and unequivocal point of view. Was it thus—would I say, actuated with the zeal with which God inspires me for their eternal welfare—was it thus, that so many celebrated penitents were converted to the Lord? Were these the resolute steps they took, when, led by the Spirit, they first entered into the way of penance? Did they not generously and openly embrace humility, austerity and holy retirement? How did your Achabs and your Nebuchadnezzars in the old law appear in the presence of God and man? Was it not in sack-cloth and an humble posture, in order to retrieve, by an authentic declaration, the mischievous effects of their scandalous lives? In the law of grace, to what did penitents without end, of all conditions and ranks condemn themselves? What restraints did they lay themselves under? Where did they tie themselves to hold their abode? In lonely places, in deserts, in monasteries. They broke with the world; which yet, without listening to flesh and blood, they thought it their incumbent duty to edify by renouncing its follies, pomps, and vanities. Should we have had a Thais or a Pelagia, so renowned for their penitence, if this had not been an

invariable maxim in our religion? How! Did then, these saints of God deceive themselves? Are they chargeable with ignorance and extreme folly? Did they undergo willingly, and to no purpose, a most galling yoke? Had they no true knowledge of the ways of God? Or, were the ways of God revealed only to us?

Alas! Christians, let us rather conclude, that as they walked in the straight and holy ways of God, we erroneously follow the most spacious and wide—directly opposite to the state to which penance should lead us. By their example, let us learn not only to refrain from evil, but to remove, with all diligence, the appearance of evil; and to that end, let us not be content with a reverential fear of our great Creator, let us learn furthermore to respect the world; for, sometimes the world, profane as it is, deserves our respect, and never more than when it condemns, is offended at, and ranks among crimes, the appearance of a crime. If in this the world seem a severe censor, let the severity of its censure contribute to edify us. If it be partial and unjust, let us turn to advantage its partiality and injustice. If it should assail us with taunts, obloquy, insult, and scorn, let us give God thanks that its very malignity serves to make us more vigilant, more regular, and better Christians. Heaven be praised that, with all its corruption, it hath a spark of zeal left for integrity of life and purity of manners, and that vice and wickedness have not yet prevailed over the minds of men, so as to obtain its sanction and approbation. Though the world seem delicate on this head, let us not conclude that it is in the wrong. Let the blame be laid rather at our own door, for that we perversely refused to subscribe to the judgment of the world, though perfectly agreeable to the law of God. Let us respect not only the wise and the strong, but (as the apostle advises) the weak and the imprudent. Let us refrain, like him, not only from that which is criminal and illicit, but from that which to us seems innocent and allowable. Why should we arrogate more liberty in our conduct than the great apostle? In fine, let us beware of all those things that may occasion uncharitableness and rash judgment; whatever may seem, in ourselves or in others, to anthorize or countenance anything sinful. Thus we shall render our penitence efficacious; and after retrenching the matter and cause of sin, after repairing its effects and consequences, it remains that we submit to the remedies against it, the subject of the third and last part.

Part III. The holy fathers, with reason, have considered sin, especially in cases of long contracted habits, as a dangerous illness, which penance only, and that, too, by administering the most powerful remedies, can cure. On this, according to St. Chrysostom, depends the sinner's destiny. A happy destiny, if, inspired with zeal for his own salvation, he is firmly resolved to make use of the remedies prescribed by penance; an unhappy destiny, if the disgust which they cause, and the repugnance which he feels, should induce him to reject them. For, none but madmen, (continues this father,) whose blind infatuation is more dangerous than their very illness, would refuse to submit to an infallible cure. We are, therefore, by the law, under two obligations, relatively to two remedies to be taken, in order effectually to destroy sin; one a preservative—the other a corrective; by means of which, if we are not absolutely assured of our justification, we have grounds to believe, and a moral certainty, that we are returned into grace and favour with God.

1st. I am not afraid to affirm, Christians, that all those who have turned their thoughts, with any degree of care and attention, on what by experience they know of themselves, have clear conceptions, from time to time, of what was sufficient to guard against sin, and restrain their affections within the bounds of duty. To this I defy the most volative mind to refuse assent. How uncollected, or inconsiderate, or precipitate, or even blinded soever a sinner may be, he is never so far hurried away but he observes, in the course of his passions, the most irregular, his deviations and relapses, and in the bottom of his heart bears this secret testimony against himself: sin, by such and such precautions, far from having any ascendant over me, might have been counteracted and totally destroyed. Now, beloved brethren, I say, that to take these necessary precautions in the way of the Lord; to be guided by our particular lights and experience; to be faithful on this head, and hearken to ourselves; to neglect nothing that may contribute to uphold, direct, and defend us, is a convincing proof of a sincere conversion.

Thus, beloved hearers, you have often remarked, that the best preservative against the love of pleasure, is application to business; that whatever collects and fixes the mind, preserves it without difficulty, or with less difficulty, in a state of innocence; and that while your days were full, as the prophet speaks, that is, fully and

profitably employed, sin found no entrance into your heart. This you well knew: and yet as you are delighted with ease and tranquillity; and you indulge the indolence which is grafted in your nature, whatever disturbs or cramps the mind, or restrains the senses, is your utter aversion. In what then consists, with regard to you, the efficacy of penance? In being constantly upon your guard against yourself; in being employed in something, as employment is the only support of your weakness; in being employed in the spirit of religious duty, although you should be influenced by no other motive; in being employed in the spirit of penitential works, for employment is a penance most pleasing to God: in being employed without evading or diminishing any the least part, how painful or toilsome soever it be, of the employment allotted you by the divine appointment; in a cheerful willingness to undergo the whole burden, though it were still more heavy, though you were in no doubt of being borne down and overwhelmed by it. Thus you are reduced to the happy situation of that ancient solitary, who was wont to say, as St. Jerom relates: "I have no time to enjoy life, how should I have time to commit sin?" So far, therefore, from qualifying labour with the name of slavery, be thankful to the Deity, who hath given you such honest and reasonable means of fencing against vice, and hath enabled you in your station to find a certain remedy for the conquering of your passions, which idleness and inattention always quicken, and which nothing but assiduity in labour can deaden.

The same I say to you, who know full well, that your frailty exposes you to many relapses; who know well that which would enable you to curb the vehemence of your passions; who know that frequent recourse to the sacred tribunal of penance, is a sovereign remedy against every the most violent and importunate attack; who know, that with the help of this sacrament, you encounter dangers with more courage, and adhere to resolutions with more constancy, and that by neglect and slothfulness in this duty, you grow weak and lukewarm; who know, that, in order to proceed steadily in the way of salvation, you should be directed by one who held the place of God, and whose prudent advice might confirm you in virtue; who know, that the obligation you lie under of applying and unbosoming yourself to him, is a check upon your levity, and a guard to your inconstancy; who know, in short, that God, in the penitential tribunal, and in the hands of his ministers,

to speak with the apostle, hath deposited those arms which we ought to put on, and with which, in the day of temptation and conflict, we may stand our ground and resist the enemy: this you know; this you have learned by woful experience. Nevertheless, confession is irksome to you, especially if frequent. The injunction laid on you by the minister of the Lord, as your spiritual physician, to present yourself to him from time to time and discover the latent wounds of your soul, is a burdensome law; a law to which you cannot submit but with great reluctance. If at first you accept the proposed terms, you speedily recoil, you retract your word, and you shake off the yoke. Can I then presume that your penitence was attended with that good faith, that candour and sincerity, which alone would make it valid in the presence of God? Had this been the case, beloved hearers, you would gladly have been cured in such an exigency, and would have sought a remedy; and, fully convinced of its utility and necessity, you would yourself, without waiting for orders, have been the first to prescribe it. With joy, and to the letter, you would have fulfilled the condition which the prudent priest, by the rules of his ministry required of you. On the day appointed, he would have seen you return to recover new strength. Fidelity and compliance would have been motives not only of duty, but of consolation.

And are we not influenced every day by things of less moment? At the return of a disease, the consequences of which you still apprehend, what are you not willing to do and to suffer? What do you not abstain from? What regimen so mortifying, what diet so loathsome, which you take not with strictness and according to prescription? What is your faith, if, when the salvation of your soul is at stake, you act upon principles directly contrary? Do you reason like a Christian, if you do not for your soul what with care and scrupulosity you do for your body?

2ndly. I shall now proceed to the second obligation, and with that shall conclude. To be efficaciously converted, it is not sufficient to refrain from sin: sins committed must be expiated by acts of vindictive justice, such as the Lord will one day exert against impenitent sinners. Now this inordination, beloved hearers, is the worst of all, as it renders penance, in most Christians, unprofitable and ineffectual. We use this sacrament, but are not amended, because we are unwilling to exercise punishment upon ourselves in proportion to our sins; and, not to look out for other reasons, we

persist in iniquity, year after year, because our self-love, an enemy to austerity, begets in us effeminacy, and banishes from our minds the slightest notion of self-controul.

If the punishment of sin, I mean voluntary punishment, to which we condemn ourselves, as arbitrators and judges in our own cause, which is properly penitence, or that part of penance which belongs to ourselves: if voluntary punishment were speedily inflicted after the sinful deed; if such were our zeal, that we forgave ourselves nothing; if, as often as we happen to swerve from our duty, we had but the courage to make due compensation by voluntary sufferings, I cannot but without hesitation, affirm, that every vice would soon be eradicated, and every passion soon subdued.

I mean not by this to insinuate that penitence is a servile virtue, proceeding only from motives of fear. For we may (says St. Augustin) suffer voluntary pains, influenced by love, and a desire of perfection, with a view to moderate our sinful appetites, and to make satisfaction for past offences. And if fear be our inducement, it may be a filial fear—a fear arising from motives of charity, by which we oblige ourselves, in order to return into favour with God, and pay him, to his greater honour and glory, a tribute of satisfaction, to perform some works of piety and devotion, to practice certain austerities, to retrench certain pleasures, and to forego certain inconveniencies.

Accordingly, when the church inflicted, heretofore, canonical penances to every species of sin, she did not mean that the faithful should lose the spirit of adoption, which had been conferred on them in the new law, nor to introduce among them the spirit of servility which reigned in the old. Her intention by this severity was, to uphold some, and reclaim others; to further in these the designs of conversion, and to maintain in those a holy perseverance. Such were her views: and her conduct in this, by the divine assistance, had so good an effect, that numberless Christians preserved to the end their baptismal innocence; and the penitence and sorrow of those who had lost it, were not to be questioned, when for one mortal sin they fasted whole years, and without opposition submitted to laborious and mortifying tasks. Then innocence flourished, and penance was exemplary, because sin was punished. But now we come off, and desire to come off, at an easier rate. And what is the consequence? That we commit sin the more freely, remain in it the

more quietly, repent of it the more slightly, discontinue it the more rarely; and that our penance is mostly of none effect, or much to be suspected, and at best doubtful. These penalties, prescribed by the church, in course of time were greatly moderated. Hence an inundation of vice commenced; hence discipline relaxed; hence Christianity wore another aspect. So true it is, that this assistance is needful for the sinner; and that while left to himself and to his own discretion, or rather pusillanimity, he cannot be deemed to be thoroughly reformed. He seeks his ease, humours his disposition, and indulges the dictates of self-love.

Let us, therefore, do now, beloved Christians, what the church did in former ages. Let us adopt the same sentiments, enter into the same spirit, conform to the same practices. Let us not forget, that if she hath abated of her rigour in some points, she meant not to encroach upon God's prerogative, in which she neither could nor would admit of relaxation; and, that if she hath consented to change regulations established by herself, she never pretended to what was not her province; namely, to mitigate the essential obligation of making satisfaction to an offended Deity. Whence we may conclude, that this condescension, rightly understood, can give no colour to our irresolution, as it is true to say, that the more we spare ourselves, the less God will spare us; the less we punish ourselves, the more he will chastise us. For, God's prerogative will always subsist, and be always the same. Persuaded, therefore, that sin must be punished either in the present world or in the world to come, either by the justice of God or by the penitence of man, let us not wait till God himself shall inflict due punishment. Let us take care to prevent the rigour of his justice by the rigour of our penitence. Inflamed with zeal, let us side with the Almighty against ourselves, and avenge his cause at our own expense.

If those who, by Almighty God's appointment, or by our own choice, are our spiritual directors, should be too indulgent, let us make amends (according to a maxim laid down by St. Bernard) for their indulgence by our own severity. If they be deficient in rigour or exactness, let us make up the deficiency for our own sakes, as none but ourselves are personally concerned, and it behoves us, not others, to mind our own interest. Let us ever apply to our spiritual evils, the evils of our soul, specific remedies; and let us punish sins of various kinds by various means: licentious

conversation, by retiring from the world; freedom of speech and indiscretion of the tongue, by silence; luxury, by moderation in dress and retinue; unlawful pleasures, by forbearing from lawful ones: "Who knoweth but he will return and forgive?" Joel ii. Who knows but the God of mercy will return to us? Or, rather, who can doubt it, after the authentic promise he hath given us? In a word, beloved hearers, let us relinquish the matter and cause of sin, let us repair the consequences and effects of sin, let us submit, cost what it will, to the remedies for sin; by doing which, and by no other means, we shall return into the way of salvation and glory.

SERMON XXIII.

ON COMMUNION.

For the Third Sunday after Epiphany.

"*Jesus saith unto him: I will come and heal him.*" *And the centurion answered and said: Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof.*" MATT. viii.

IN this passage, Christians, we see a kind of contest between Christ and the centurion; but in this contest, which seems the most to claim our admiration—the charity of a God, or the humility of a pagan? I may safely say, that there never was strife more holy, or more proper for instruction and edification. Our Saviour, by an impulse of benificent charity is for going in person into the house of the centurion, and the centurion accounts himself unworthy of that honour. The only begotten Son of God, whose mercy is unlimited, assures him that he will come, and by his presence will cure his paralytic servant: "I will come and heal him;" but the centurion, confused at so signal a favour, protests openly that he is unworthy of it, and acknowledges his unworthiness: "Lord, I am not worthy." Be pleased to take notice. This is a Gentile, to whom our blessed Saviour, in quality of Messiah,

hath not been as yet announced or revealed, as he hath been to the Jews; and, notwithstanding that, Gentile as he is, he is already prepossessed with so high an opinion of, and so profound a respect for the Messiah who accosts him, that he cannot consent to receive his visit. A humility (says St. Augustin) which arose from a lively and ardent faith; and which, by an operation of our Redeemer's grace, transformed, on this spot, this Gentile not only into a veritable Israelite, but a perfect Christian. A humility with which Jesus Christ was well pleased, which he very much set by, and which he honoured with commendations; but to which, notwithstanding, it may truly be said that he paid no regard, whereas on the contrary, upon that very account, he insisted upon going into the centurion's house.

Here let us stop: and to profit, pursuant to the views of God, by so great an example, let us bring this gospel narrative home to our own case. For, that which passed (as St. Chrysostom remarks) between Christ and the centurion, is every day repeated between Christ and us. My meaning is, that this same Saviour, by instituting the eucharist, hath left us a sacrament by which he wills to impart himself to us; and, God as he is, to dwell corporally between our breasts; a sacrament, by which he visits us in person, with a view to heal our spiritual infirmities. As often, therefore, as we prepare to receive him in this adorable mystery, he still says to us with as much truth as he said heretofore: "I will come and heal;" how low soever you may be reduced, if, by a sincere acknowledgment of our weakness, we answer like the centurion: no, my Lord, I am not worthy that you should come to me and enter into my breast. For, these are the venerable words which the church puts into our mouths, when this God of glory, hidden under the form of the elementary species, is ready to take up his abode in our breasts: "Lord, I am not worthy." Efficacious words, which (according to the words of St. Augustin) have the virtue to operate in a Christian soul a miracle quite contrary to that which they signify: for when we pronounce them, they cancel the unworthiness we attribute to ourselves, and give us, with regard to Christ and his sacrament, a fund of merit which we should not be able to acquire without them. Words, which by a wonderful operation of grace, direct our steps to the term from which they seemingly withhold us, as according to the doctrine of all the fathers, the chief, and indeed essential disposition for worthily receiving the

body of Christ is, to believe and confess ourselves unworthy of it. Words, in fine, which point out our humility to the Son of God, without the least obstructing his charity; and which, far from making him keep away from us, serves as an attractive to make him come to us.

But, beloved hearers, it so falls out, that often in applying these words to ourselves, we strain the sense of them beyond the intention of our blessed Saviour; and, in order to square them to our own fancy, we run the hazard of directly counteracting the views of God. In this sacrament, Christ Jesus seeks us, and we withdraw from him. Through excess of love, he wishes to honour us with his holy visits and we will not receive them. He asks to take up his abode in our hearts, and we under specious, nay, religious pretexts refuse him admittance: for, to exculpate ourselves upon this refusal, we plead our unworthiness; and we say, problably in a different spirit from that of the centurion, "Lord, I am not worthy." As this is the most obvious and common excuse, it is incumbent on me to consider it particularly, not absolutely with a view to oppose and decry it, nor yet to prove its rectitude, but to examine its nature, which will give me an opportunity of delivering the most solid and important doctrines respecting the practice and use of communion.

To abstain from communion under colour of unworthiness, is an excuse, Christians, according to the different dispositions and qualities of those who allege it, susceptible of very different interpretations; and my design, of which this is a succinct notion, is to lay these different interpretations before you, that you may enter into the nature of this excuse, and of the good or bad consequences deducible from it. For there are among Christians two sorts of people who set out on this principle, and may say with the centurion, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter into my breast; the righteous, who live in the observance and practice of the law of God, and sinners, who are overwhelmed in the vices and follies of a criminal life. In regard to the righteous it can hardly be doubted, that they are induced by the feelings of an humble heart to speak in that manner. But to know to what length this humility should be carried, and whether it be reasonable that it should make them keep away from Jesus Christ and his sacrament: to know whether the privation of the blessed eucharist, for a righteous soul, may be deemed an ordinary exer-

cise of penance; whether penance of this kind be conformable to the intentions of the Son of God; whether it accords with the end and institution of this mystery; whether it corresponds with the standing usage of the earliest times of the Christian religion; whether it be received and approved by the church in later ages; whether it be countenanced by the ancient fathers, and whether it may be profitable; in a word, whether Jesus Christ, as contained in the divine sacrament of his body, esteems himself honoured, when the righteous, instead of approaching him, withdraw from him, and whether it be rendering him true respect, as he is the Bread of Life, to be contented only with reverencing and adoring him, and not corporally receiving him, are questions, beloved hearers, of which, for sundry and weighty reasons, general and particular, I shall wave the discussion, leaving them to your own particular examination. Besides, as it would be no easy matter to say anything new upon this topic, perhaps it might not do so much good, as may, with good reason, be hoped for from a discourse solely consecrated to the edification of your souls.

I shall, therefore, speak only of those sinners, who may tell Jesus Christ with much more reason than did St. Peter: "Depart from me, because I am a sinful man." Luke v. These I divide into three classes. The first are sincere sinners; the second, blind sinners; and the last, hypocritical sinners. Sincere sinners behave with candour in the presence of God, and are not deceived. Blind sinners are totally ignorant of their own condition, and impose upon themselves. In fine, hypocritical and dissembling sinners cover their libertinism with a veil of piety, and make it their business to deceive others. The first have religion, and are actuated by the spirit of it. The second, although they have some religion, have a wrong notion that they are actuated by the spirit of it. The last, although they would seem to be actuated by the spirit of religion, have in reality no religion at all. Now these three kinds of sinners may hold the language we find the centurion in the gospel held: "Lord, I am not worthy," and decline communicating on account of unworthiness. But, although they all of them assert it equally, they are not all of them equally to be credited. For, to lay still more open the plan of my discourse: in the first, that is, in sincere sinners, this excuse is a reason; in the second, that is, in blind sinners, this excuse is a pretext; and

in the last, that is, in hypocritical and libertine sinners, this excuse is an abuse, and even a scandal. And this is now what I undertake to demonstrate. But I proceed farther: for, three things I add to this, which will put the characters of these three sinners in a clear point of view, and must needs convey material instruction.

First: unworthiness is a reason for the sincere sinner to abstain from communion; and I hold that this reason ought farther to be explained.

Secondly: unworthiness is a pretext for the blind sinner to abstain from communion; and to remove this pretext is of the utmost consequence.

Thirdly: unworthiness is an abuse and scandal in the hypocritical sinner, and consequently a reason to abstain from communion; and my duty obliges me to impugn and bear down this abuse and scandal.

Part I. That my first position may appear in as clear a light as possible, I must premise, Christians, that I speak of a sinner, who preserves in the midst of his evil courses a fund of religion; who behaves toward God at least with openness and unfeigned sincerity; who acknowledges the unhappy state of his conscience; confesses his sin, bewails it with sighs, but as yet is not quite disposed to relinquish it. To abstain in that case from the sacred table, because he is unworthy, is a well-founded reason, I own, for the sinner, as the doctrine of faith makes it clear and evident, that so long as his sin is not obliterated, he cannot approach the divine sacrament, without being involved in the guilt of sacrilege. But, beloved hearers, I say that this reason should farther be elucidated, and this elucidation consists in showing you that he must not stop there: I mean, that he must not so abstain from communion, on account of unworthiness, as to think he hath fully performed his duty, by declining to partake of this sacred mystery; but that he must lay down another principle, equally essential, and equally incontestable: I mean, he must know the obligation he is under of quitting forthwith his state of unworthiness in order to be admitted to the holy repast. So that communion itself becomes a pressing motive, which induces him to the necessity of working his conversion, and obliges him to use his utmost endeavours, by a speedy repentance, to procure admission to the adorable sacrament, from which his sinful state withholds him. This is the disposition, if he knows his duty, in which it is his bounden duty to be; and,

without which, I maintain that there is nothing solid in his conduct.

For, beloved Christians, the great maxim on which is hinged the whole conduct of a sinner, in regard to communion is, never to separate these two points—two inviolable rules in our holy religion: one, that Jesus Christ lays his commands on us to eat his flesh; the other, that he puts us under a strict prohibition of eating it unworthily: one, that the flesh of this God-man is the food of our souls; the other, that this food, though wholesome in itself, is poison for those who presume to take it in the state of sin: one, that as it is not possible to support the natural life without the help of aliments, so it is not possible to support the supernatural life of grace, without the holy eucharist; the other, that as aliments in a diseased body, far from supplying it with strength and nourishment, weaken it, and destroy the source of life; so the eucharist is death to those who receive it without purifying their heart. If the sinner adheres to one of these points, without joining the other, he assuredly goes astray, and is lost for ever; but if he unites them, he enters directly into the way of God. Hear how he reasons: Christ Jesus forbids me to eat his flesh, and keeps me at a distance, so long as my heart is swayed by sin: it is, therefore, my duty to beware of eating it in my present state. But he tells me that if I eat it not, I neither have, nor can have, the supernatural life in which consist the sanctification and happiness of the righteous man; I am therefore obliged, cost what it will, to quit my present sinful state, in order to render myself capable of eating it. I cannot withdraw from the obedience due to both the one and the other of these commandments; to the former for Christ's sake, to the latter for my own. If I receive communion unworthily, I profane the body of the Lord; and thus I must take care of the interests of Christ. If I do not receive communion at all, I murder my soul, by depriving her of that which alone could nourish her and keep her in union and co-operation with grace; and thus I must secure my own interests. If, remaining a sinner, I participate of the eucharist, I participate of it to my own condemnation; but if I do not participate of it, I shall certainly perish. There remains, therefore, but one alternative; to change my life, to renounce my sin, to return into the grace and favor of God, to fit myself for eating this bread of life, in order that it may become for me a life-giving bread. For by that means, I shall comply with

my duty both in what concerns the honour of Jesus, and my own advantage. Thus shall I fulfil what God requires, which is, that I eat, and that I live by eating this bread with profit. Thus, I say, the sinner will reason; and this way of reasoning will be the decisive and infallible cause of his conversion. Whereas, if he only minds his unworthiness, he will spend his days in a circle of crimes, not taking so much as one resolution relative to salvation, or one step in the view of returning with speed to God.

Now this principle, beloved Christians, which every sinner should lay down for himself, is that which the ministers of the gospel should adopt in delivering instruction upon this topic. Of the two precepts, which I have just been explaining, they should never inculcate one, without remonstrating, at the same time, the necessity of the other. The reason is this: one without the other is at best unserviceable, perhaps prejudicial. For if you perpetually represent to a sinner the horrible danger of an unworthy communion, without ever mentioning the indispensable necessity of communicating worthily, the consequence is, that he will never communicate; which is directly contrary to the express command of our Saviour, who says: "Unless ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, ye shall have no life in you." John vi. But if, on the other hand, you mention only the necessity of communicating, without ever making him apprehend the danger of an unworthy communion, you put him in the way of making many imperfect, nay, sacrilegious communions, in direct opposition to St. Paul's words: "Let a man prove himself." 1 Cor. xi. And this, beloved hearers, (give me leave in this place to make a natural reflection, in which I am sure you will join issue with me,) this hath been the cause of all the evils which the diversity of opinions hath produced in all ages of the Christian era, as it gave too often contrariant biases to the minds of men concerning the use of the divine sacrament. The zeal of some was confined to such methods of intimidation as might keep the sinner from the sacred mysteries; and they repeat to him over and over again these terrible words: "He that eateth unworthily, eateth damnation to himself," (1 Cor. xi.) which tended only to inspire him with a horror of an unworthy communion. Others exerted their whole powers in exhorting him to receive the divine food; and they invited him incessantly by that comfortable promise of our Saviour: "He that eateth this bread shall live for ever;" (John vi.;) by which they seemed only to aim at raising in him

an efficacious desire of holy communion. They never were perfectly agreed in their manner of carrying Christ's design into execution. Had they gone hand in hand, and joined in sentiment, very great advantage would have accrued to the church from so admirable a coalition, inasmuch as it would have been a certain means of sanctifying sinners. But as they disagreed, and as each side was wedded to their own opinion, neither sinners nor the church could receive the advantage which God intended. For they who ever and anon rung in the ears of their hearers the anathematical curse pronounced by St. Paul against the abuse of communion, without mentioning what might serve as a motive for receiving that sacrament, by little and little abolished the use of it, and made the guests withdraw from the bridegroom's table. But they, likewise, who endeavoured only to give a high idea of the fruits of communion, and the tendency of whose speeches was solely to draw a great number of guests to the table of our Saviour, ran a mighty hazard (like the servants in the parable) of convening indifferently the good and the bad. What was said on both sides might have been very true; and yet on neither side did they say enough to produce the effect of the sacrament of Christ Jesus, because they said on neither side but half of that which ought to have been said. Upon this the holy bishop of Geneva judiciously remarks, that the whole should have been said; and that the invitation of these should have been brought in conjunction with the menaces of those. The sinner should be told: be afraid of approaching this holy table, and be afraid of not approaching it. Be afraid of approaching it, if you are not robed in the nuptial garment—which is divine grace; and be afraid of not approaching it, because none but the enemies of God are excluded. The food which is offered you is mortal for you, if you discern it not justly by the spirit of faith; but know, moreover, that it is a wholesome food, without which Christ Jesus will not abide in you, nor will you in him. Wherefore, receive this food with trembling; for to receive it with trembling is one of the necessary dispositions in receiving it. But tremble still more if you do not receive it, because you will not be prevailed upon to receive it with the necessary preparation. Thus they should have spoken.

And indeed, Christians, all the fathers of the church, when they opened their minds upon the same subject held the same language. As those great men were certainly actuated by the Spirit of God,

they were far from separating those two things, which they knew full well our Saviour intended should never be separated. St. Chrysostom bids us examine and judge ourselves, lest in participating of Christ's body, we draw down upon our heads coals of living fire—that is, the indignation and vengeance of God. Thus he expressed himself; and the energy of his words was capable to inspire the faithful who heard him with dread and horror. But this he immediately softens by telling them: now this I say not with intent to deter you from partaking of it—God forbid! but that you may partake of it with proper dispositions, and according to the sacred rules prescribed by the law of God. For, (continues he,) as by partaking of it, without due consideration, we rashly expose ourselves to be lost for ever; so the not partaking of it is the ruin and death of the Christian man. I observe (says St. Augustin) that some among you decline communicating from a consciousness of great and unrepented sins; but I solemnly declare to them—(an important decision this of that father)—that if they stop there, and proceed not to action, they increase the weight and number of their sins, by sinning anew, and depriving themselves of the most necessary and most sovereign remedy. Therefore, my brethren, (concludes he,) I conjure you, if any of you judge yourselves unworthy of communion, to render yourselves worthy with all expedition; because whoever is unworthy of this divine sacrament is unworthy of God.

Thus spoke the fathers. Now what they said in general and absolute terms, is still more weighty, when considered relatively to that holy time, in which the faithful are obliged by the express and particular command of Christ himself, determined by the church, to receive communion; it is the Easter solemnity, which cannot be celebrated but by the manducation of the Lamb, Christ Jesus. For, on that occasion, to threaten the sinner with the wrath of God if he presume to communicate in a sinful state, and not to threaten him with the same wrath if he do not relinquish his sinful state, in order to satisfy this commandment, "Unless you eat," would be to instruct him but by halves, and to afford him an opportunity of fomenting his impenitence. He must be made to know the order of the Master—I mean the great Master, by telling him what Christ, by two of his disciples, sent to tell the man whose house he made choice of wherein to celebrate the Feast of the Passover: "The master saith, I will keep the Passover at thy house."

Matt. xxvi. He must be told: brother, it is within yourself that the mystery of the Passover must be fulfilled, as the time approaches in which Jesus Christ, who is the true Passover, desires to be received by you in the adorable eucharist. True it is, you are not in readiness; but for that very reason it is, that we declare it to you, to the intent you may prepare yourself seriously, speedily, and efficaciously. For there is, in this case, no mean, no temperature between the two extremes. Remaining in sin, you cannot avoid either profaning or deserting the sacrament of Christ; profaning it, if you presume to eat this Passover, without preparing for it by a sincere conversion; deserting it, if for want of preparation and conversion, you are not in a condition requisite to eat it. To think it not strictly agreeable to propriety that you should be reduced to this dilemma, were to arraign the conduct of the church, which is your mother, and of Christ, who is your God; and to say that this dilemma may lead you into excesses, were to endeavour to clear yourself by your very excesses, which consist in the abuse of the most holy things. Be that as it may, this is the penalty by which the church hath, in virtue of her power of binding and unbinding, a canonical right to punish your disobedience; namely, to cut you off from her communion as a scandalous member, when through hardness of heart, or an inveterate attachment to the object of your passion, you withdraw from the communion of the body Christ Jesus. By this, however, she meant not to entangle you in difficulties and perplexities, or expose you to the danger of adding sin to sin; but, like a zealous mother, would lay on you an obligation of making use of what is most salutary and sacred in the Christian religion. To this end, you must break your bands, and quit for ever your criminal engagements. But let it not be forgotten, that this is the object to which the precept of communion tends. You must pull out the eye that gives you scandal; that is, you must break off those intercourses which are the scandal of your life. But herein, you should admire the precept of communion, which forces you, as it were, to do that which is pleasing in the sight of God.

But what were the views of the church in enacting these rigorous laws against obdurate sinners, disobedient to her mandates, and neglectful of solemnizing the Paschal Feast? She meant to lay them under a strict obligation, and compel them by necessity. And, whereas, the Holy Ghost declares the legality of such pro-

ceeding in express terms, "compel them to come in;" (Luke xiv.;) she chooses to make use of compulsive methods, that, purified by penance, they may deserve admittance to the table of our Lord. These were the holy methods she used in former times, and this was the violence she exerted against that kind of sinners. For, whatever she deemed of their sinful practices, being Christians and her children, their religion and faith gave her room to hope, that they would never appear at the sacred table, without previous preparation. Accordingly, being affected themselves, though sinners, with a religious respect and profound veneration for the holy sacrament, they did, to receive it, that which otherwise they would never have done; I mean, they were totally changed and reformed, to which they would never have been induced by any other motive whatever. This obligation, by which they were compelled to eat the flesh of a God, and the horror they conceived of unworthily eating it, was what converted them—what tore from their hearts the most predominant passions, and what made them take all the necessary measures, in order to return into favour with God. You object that this method occasions sacrileges; and I answer, that there is nothing, how sacred soever, which may not be profaned by the wickedness of man; and yet that our Saviour commands, under pain of eternal reprobation, every one of the faithful, without exception, to eat his flesh; and that the church, his spouse, would not have acted conformable to his intention, if, at the same time that she publishes to the world St. Paul's anathema against unworthy communion, she did not lay them under the happy necessity of receiving communion holily and profitably.

And here, beloved hearers, are two rocks against which we are usually dashed in these times by the spirit of the world. Provided a sinner be induced to perform, to outward appearance, the duty of a Christian, and to approach the sanctuary, we think much is done. Upon no other grounds we extol his religion—we make no doubt that he is fully converted, and are pleased with the thoughts of his perseverance: this is the first rock. But, on the other side, provided he be made (so long as he remains in his sinful habit) to beware of communicating, we think all is done; and if this sinner, confessing his unworthiness, keeps away from the altar, we are satisfied as though he had fulfilled all justice. And thus he is suffered to range in an endless round of follies, and to waste his thoughtless days in vice. It would seem as if his not receiving

communion was a cover for the rest, and he then was allowed to live with impunity, and after the corrupt desires of his heart. From the former of these two abuses, it follows that there are, among those who receive communion, many weak, sluggish Christians; or to use the great apostle's expression, there are many who sleep the sleep of death: "For this cause, there are many weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." 1 Cor. xi. But of the latter, what is the consequence? That among those who withdraw from communion, there are innumerable multitudes who lead scandalous lives, and who claim to themselves the infamous privilege of giving to the church no mark of their Christianity, as the mark by which we are essentially distinguished, in quality of Christians, is (according to St. Paul) the participation of the body of Jesus Christ. From this decay of Christian observances—nay, from this prescription to live at large, we are scarce any longer surprised to see that worldlings are notoriously known to be involved, as it were, in spontaneous excommunication; and that those holy canons, those sacred laws by which such disorders were directed to be punished, are no more—or seem to be no more in force. A decay, which plunges the true pastors of God's church into agonies of sorrow, being witnesses to the loss of so many souls. And all this, because such sinners are not sufficiently instructed in their duty—because they are not made to know the whole extent of it; because they are taught only to avoid one scandal by another; the scandal of a bad communion by the scandal of impenitence, or the scandal of impenitence by the scandal of a bad communion; instead of being made to understand—that it is not sufficient barely to retrench either the one or the other, but that they must avoid both the one and the other.

For, O my God, your holy sacrament was instituted equally for sinners and the righteous. Not, indeed, for impenitent, but converted sinners—changed, reformed, sanctified sinners. While you tarried upon earth, O adorable Saviour, you disdained not to eat at the table of sinners; and now, from a very different motive, but through the same spirit, you admit penitent sinners to your table. And as, heretofore, you ate at the table of sinners, converted by your holy grace much more willingly than at the table of the proud and haughty Pharisees; so I may say for the comfort of my audience and myself, that there are no Christians more favourably received by you than converted sinners—sinners who renounce

their evil practices, in order to come to you. But this, as I said, is to be understood only of those sinners who act with openness and a candid mind. For if they be worldlings, who shut their eyes against their own failings and impose upon themselves, the supposed respect which they allege for withdrawing from the sacrament of Christ is no longer a reason that requires explanation, but a pretext—which I am to remove in the second part.

Part II. There is nothing more subtile than the spirit of the world in leading us to its end, nor more artful in giving to things whatever colour and form it pleases when the point is to dazzle and to warp the judgment in the ways of God. For then it proposes every specious motive; and not unfrequently we let ourselves be ensnared insomuch, that we are fully persuaded and believe that we honour God by keeping away from him. Now this is the case with those other sinners of whom I am at present about to speak: they flatter themselves that they want not religion, nay, that they are influenced by the spirit of religion, yet are much mistaken; they deviate widely from the straight and simple path of truth, and their humility is, in fact, a gross error. My meaning is this: they say, nay think that it is out of respect they keep from communion, because they acknowledge in the presence of God that they are unworthy of it. But I shall show them, first, that it is a vain respect: secondly, that considering it in the manner they apply it, and in all its circumstances, it is a false respect: finally, that it hath no conformity with that respect which true Christians have always shown whenever they separated (according to the rules and spirit of the church) from the sacrament of Christ. Three important reflections these, by which I undertake, not to put them to confusion but to confound, in their persons, the spirit of the world—that spirit which blinds them, which, to bring them to the precipice and work their destruction, makes a glimmer of devotion, a false glimmer, play before their eyes even in their indevotion.

1st. It is a vain respect, and thus I prove the assertion. For, what is understood by a vain respect? What operates nothing; what hath no consequence; what answers no purpose; what tends to no end; what doth nothing to render the Christian more worthy of Christ Jesus and his sacrament; what leaves the sinner in the same imperfections; what makes him neither more regular nor more fervent, nor more holy; in a word, what the only solid proof of is—to abstain from communion. Now such is the respect of

that kind of sinners to whom I address this second instruction; and if pride will permit them to own their weakness, they will join issue with me.

And, indeed, if the respect which they have, or believe they have for the Son of God were the real motive that withheld them from communion, it would, by dint of instigation, and by frequent impressions induce them to undertake something more; and if it were ever so little effectual, they would give some sign, by their outward demeanour, that they were affected with it. Now this they do not in any shape. For, to what would this motive—to what would this sentiment of respect induce them? To withdraw from the world, as (by their own confession) it is the love of the world that renders them unworthy of the sacred banquet. Affected with their unworthiness, and owning that it arose from the untoward passion they entertained for the world—for the false, the fleeting joys of the world; for the unchristian and dangerous diversions of the world; for the intrigues, the vanity, the luxury of the world—what would they do? They would wean their affections from those diversions, those pleasures—that luxury, that vanity—those intrigues; and, by offering this perfect sacrifice to Christ, from unworthy sinners would be Christians worthy to partake of his flesh. These are the testimonies of respect which they would give him, and which it is incumbent on them to give him. Nothing however, of all this is done; and to judge by their actions, they seem to have no disposition that way. They themselves, if I were to appeal to their own consciences, would frankly confess that they are far from it.

It is, therefore, a very mistaken notion, that this respect affects them as much as they would make us believe. It is not, therefore, this respect that keeps them away from the divine mysteries. What then? I have said it, and I say it again—an obstinate attachment to the world, and all that is called the world. They belong to the world, they are part of the world; and that world which God reprobates finds no relish for the things of God. They love the world more than Christ—and therefore, they relinquish Christ for the world. This outward respect is a veil in which their self-love glories; but it is, at bottom, the world that possesses their very souls, and inspires into them a coolness, an indifference, or to speak more properly, a disgust of communion.

And this is what our Saviour himself would give us to under-

stand, in the parable, by the guests who neglected to come to the feast because other cares had wholly engrossed their thoughts and affections. There is, however, (St. Augustin observes,) this remarkable difference; that the guests in the parable sincerely confessed the reasons which induced them to keep away; whereas the worldlings, of whom I speak, affect to know not, nay, to hide from themselves the cause of their disorder. They always allege this weak pretext—that as they are unworthy to receive communion they cannot do better than to refrain from it; and accordingly they harbour a secret complacency, as though they honoured Christ Jesus thereby, and Christ Jesus would, one day, load them with rewards for abandoning his altars in order to enjoy the pleasures of the world with more ease and greater liberty. For their infatuation, beloved hearers, rises to that height; and to convince them (says St. Chrysostom)—this seems unanswerable—to convince them that this supposed respect, so far as it regards them, is a pretext, and no reason, though they communicate but rarely they do not communicate the more worthily. That is, when they do communicate, they do not prepare themselves for it the more; they search not their hearts with more care; they do not retire the more from the world; and, if the expression be not too bold, they are at no more charge for Christ's reception. By the most fallacious of all maxims they flatter themselves, that to communicate seldom, without anything else, will stand them in lieu of all merit; and by an evident error, which they do not discern, they measure the whole respect which they render to this divine mystery, not by greater attention to themselves, not by greater application to their duty, not by greater exactness and regularity, but by the interval—the space which elapses between one communion and another. An infallible sign (subjoins St. Chrysostom) that they are not influenced either by humility or respect, but are seduced by the delusions and spirit of the world.

Now I say, Christians, that to remove this pretext is of the utmost importance; not by facilitating communion to them, nor by prompting them to it, while they walk in the paths of worldly folly. I am well aware how much the dignity of this sacrament requires of the faithful; and wo is me, if, in the greatest and most holy of all Christian actions, and in the disposition requisite to the duly performing of it, I should ever countenance the slightest abatement. But what I understand by the removing of this pre-

text is, that they ought to be made to speak to the purpose, and not to say: I refrain from receiving the body of Christ, because I hold it in profound respect; but, I refrain from receiving it because I lead a debauched life, and will not submit to the sacred laws which religion prescribes in order to receive it. I refrain from receiving it because I lead a dissipated life, and my whole thoughts are taken up with nothing but the world and my pleasures. I refrain from receiving it because I lead a pusillanimous life, and have not the courage to do anything or undertake anything for the salvation of my soul. I refrain from receiving it because I attend to my temporal affairs with excessive eagerness, which drains my heart of spiritual unction and hardens it in regard to the things of God. I refrain from receiving it, because I am unwilling to take up a resolution of mortifying my senses and offering my inclinations the least violence. I refrain from receiving it, because I would live in mental emancipation, independent of submission, rule and order, and after the capriciousness of my own humour. To oblige the worldling to agree to all this, and to show him forthwith the irregularity of his conduct, and the flagrant injury done to our Saviour by thus neglecting his adorable sacrament—to make him understand that he doth not an honour but an outrage to God; to make him apprehend that he draws upon himself that terrible curse with which our Saviour concludes the parable: "For, I say unto you, that none of those men who were bidden shall taste my supper;" (Luke xiv.;) to convince him of all this were the surest means to dispel the dangerous infatuating cloud that darkens his understanding and holds his mind in perpetual delusion. How often, Christians, hath this prediction of the Saviour of men, though minatory only, been fulfilled to the letter! And how many Christians, for having abandoned communion in the course of life, have been deprived of it, by a secret judgment of the heavenly ruler, at the hour of death! But to proceed:

2ndly. Not only it is a vain, but a false respect. The reason is, that it is not accompanied with the two conditions essential to it: one, a piercing sorrow for being separated from the body of Christ; the other, a sincere desire of approaching it: conditions inseparable from true respect, but of which the worldling, if he enters but a little into himself, will find that his heart is wholly destitute. A piercing sorrow for being separated from the body of Christ; for if I honour him as much as I ought to do, and have that respectful

attachment to him, of which I flatter myself with the possession, I ought to look upon it as my supreme good to be united with him in the present life. I say united, especially by a sacrament which he hath himself instituted to keep up a holy and ineffable union between him and me. Whence it follows, that by the same rule, I ought to look upon it as my sovereign evil to be separated from this adorable sacrament, of which the participation is a pledge, or rather an anticipation of my beatitude.

And this St. Chrysostom understood perfectly, when, speaking of communion, he said to his audience: "Let your only grief be, that you are deprived of this food," this heavenly food, the flesh of Christ Jesus. Your only grief: for in comparison with this, what are all the other causes of affliction? If, then, I really respect this sacrament in the degree it is respectable, and I would be thought to respect it, nothing should be more painful or afflicting to me than to see myself deprived of this divine nourishment. And, indeed, it ought to create in my heart greater grief than all the losses and crosses in the world. This consideration, "I am separated from my God," if I believe the revealed truths of religion, ought to fill my soul with greater bitterness, and pierce it with sharper stings of sorrow, than the son of Isaac felt when excluded from parental benediction; and thereby I enter, in a Christian manner, into the spirit and meaning of St. Chrysostom's words: "Let your only grief be, that you are deprived of this food."

But still more piercing ought my grief to be if I have room to attribute the separation to myself—a separation arising from my own infidelity, from my obstinate attachment to a shameful object that holds me captive, from my disinclination to make to Christ the sacrifice he expects: but what an increase of heart-anguish, if I rightly discern the whole complication of evils caused by so woful a separation! When the church, exerting the severity of her discipline on the primitive Christians, deprived them for a time of the sacred banquet, what did they do, and what were their feelings? The fathers informs us, that their spirits sunk, that they fell into melancholy, that they sighed, that they moaned, that they shed floods of tears, that they looked upon their state as a temporary reprobation. Thus, though deprived of communication with him, they retained a real respect for Christ Jesus. But have those worldlings, of whom I speak, ever felt this Christian and religious

sorrow? I appeal for testimony to their own hearts, and call themselves to witness. Forbidden to communicate, with what tranquillity do they bear the forbiddance? With what indolent ease do they see themselves separated from the God of their salvation? With what insensibility do they bring themselves not only to feel no regret at it, but to find relief by it? Communion in the course of a worldly life is a heavy burden, and they rid themselves of it. It checks, or interrupts their vain pleasures, and they abandon it, to enjoy them without check or interruption. In order to communicate, certain measures must be kept and restraints put up with; but they find it more convenient to keep away from it, and communicate no more. With these dispositions shall they persuade me that they entertain a true respect for Christ Jesus and his sacrament? And although they should persist in their asseverations, should I not be at liberty to reject their words as clashing with truth and right reason?

Again, it is a false respect, because it carries not with it a desire of communion. This, I presume, will appear in the sequel. For, beloved Christians, the respect for Christ Jesus, which I am bound to have, may induce me for a time to withdraw from communion, but will never extinguish, no nor diminish, if it be real and true, my desire of communion. So far from it, the more I find myself unworthy to communicate, with the greater ardour I ought in one sense to desire to communicate: for, this desire is evidently a means of repairing my unworthiness. And, in effect, it is through this desire that I return to Christ Jesus, and it is in virtue of it that I endeavour to come nearer and nearer to him. It is through this desire, that, to the same intent, I seek every means, surmount every obstacle, and am faithful in executing every resolution. So long as I am actuated by this desire, the seeds of life are still within me and I am equal to any the most holy undertaking. Whereas when this desire ceases, I am as it were, dead without any sentiment to bring me back to Christ Jesus, or any instigation to make me return to him. Whence it follows, that not only all my unworthiness subsists, but that the extinguishing of this desire is, in some degree, the consummation of my unworthiness. A consummate unworthiness, the consequences of which St. Ambrose was not afraid of swelling to exaggeration, when he held that the loss of this desire might be deemed a presage of future reprobation. Ah! my Lord, (cries out this father,) it is of this adorable eucha-

ristic bread the sacred writings speak when they tells us, that "they who estrange themselves from thee shall perish:" that is, all those who lose the desire of being united with you, shall be cast off by you.

Now all this coincides with the notions of the first faithful. I shall dwell a little upon their example, an example that cannot be too often proposed. Upon that account it was, that when they were deprived of the holy mysteries, and communion was withheld them, they expressed so lively, so ardent a desire of being readmitted. Upon that account it was that they asked it so pressingly, and conjured the priests, prostrate at their feet, to shorten the melancholy days they were ordered to live separate from their Saviour. Upon that account it was, that they besought the martyrs to lend them their intercession; and in this (says St. Cyprian) appeared their respect, their true respect. But how doth the man of the world demean himself? Content to resemble them in this separation, he takes no pains to follow their example in other respects; and, confounding communion with the desire of communion, he renounces equally both the one and the other, and retains no more for the sacrament of Christ, than an indifference of heart which should fill him with horror.

This, beloved hearers, is what the fathers deplored so bitterly; this is what they looked upon as one of the wounds, and greatest misfortunes of the times they lived in; this is what St. Chrysostom objected with such energy to the people of Antioch. What a shame, (says he,) my brethren, to see your coolness, when you are spoke to about receiving the Holy of Holies! If a pompous spectacle be exhibited in town, it attracts your attention and you run to it in crowds, but nothing can induce you to take part in the august sacrifice of our altars. All your public places, all your amphitheatres are filled, but the table of Christ Jesus is abandoned. In vain are we assiduous in distributing to you the celestial gifts: no one among you is willing to receive them. Christ Jesus waits for you in person, and he is forsaken. Sometimes this father represented to them with what zeal they flocked to hear his discourses, while they discovered so little, to receive from his hands the pledge of their salvation. Sometimes he complained of their obduracy concerning this sacrament of love. Sometimes he showed them the dangerous consequences of the ill-judged respect on which they plumed themselves. And here, beloved hearers,

imagine to yourselves that it is St. Chrysostom that addresses you, as in fact it is; or bless kind heaven, which inspired that great man, in those days, with that which should now confound your pitiable, but pernicious errors.

3rdly. I have told you, and have already made appear in great part, that the respect which the worldling pleads in excuse for not receiving the body of the Lord, hath no conformity with that of the primitive ages of the church. Of this the proof is very obvious: for in those flourishing ages of Christianity, the sinner, while separate from the body of Christ, was taken up with the exercise of a laborious penance, of which he underwent the whole rigour with surprising courage. And this penance, according to the laws and discipline of the church, was not a mere ceremony, whereas it consisted of painful austerities. Abstinence and fasts, sack-cloth and ashes, hair-shirts and chains, and severe flagellations, were, it is well known, its inseparable concomitants. And hence it appears how greatly the sinner honoured Christ Jesus, since he desired to undergo such rigorous practices, and make him, at the expense of his ease and comfort, so signal a reparation.

And now be it owned, to our eternal shame, that proofs of this nature suit not the taste or devotion of worldlings. In whatever respect for Christ they may pride themselves, they will not put thomselves to that trouble. Infatuated with the world, and with its false joys and false delicacy, they expect to come off at an easier rate. The sum total of their penance is, that they communicate no more; a kind of penance that gives them no trouble. So far from it, it sooths their inclination, and occasions their living in greater liberty, or, more properly, in greater libertinism. For, to this pass it is that things are brought by their pretext of false respect; and I would to God that the mischievous error which I am now endeavouring to defeat, were a chimerical phantom, and not a real truth! But I shall dismiss this topic, and proceed to show you, that this supposed respect for the sacrament is, in fact, a scandal in the hypocritical sinner, the subject of the third and last part.

Part III. It is a pretty generally received maxim, that what is good in itself, is not always so with respect to the principle from which it derives; and one of the rules of prudence is, to look on things even the most salutary with a suspicious eye, so soon as we find that they flow from an infected and poisoned source. Now

we may, nay, we ought to apply this rule to what regards religion and the practice of piety. I know not, Christians, whether you have ever made a reflection that to me seems solid, and the truth of which I am sure you will comprehend more easily than I do: to wit, that whenever disputes arose among Christians concerning relaxation or severity of discipline, certain libertines were not only ready, but eager to declare for and side with the severe party: not that they intended to embrace such opinion in practice and follow it, a disposition from which they were very remote; but to enjoy the unaccountable pleasure of talking of it, or to make it serve as a convenient veil for covering their designs. Accordingly, there have been, time after time, men otherwise immersed in scandalous vices, men equally wrong-headed and corrupt-hearted, vain, voluptuous, self-loving men who were the first and most zealous in standing forth in behalf and support of reformation. Women there have been, but too well known for what they had been, and perhaps for what they were at that present; women, whose mouths the past should have shut, who declaimed eloquently against depravity of manners, who thought nothing sufficiently exact or rigid in the government of the church, and who appealed incessantly to the ancient canons as they were in force at their first institution. But is not this zeal for the purity of morals and perfection of Christianity to be commended in a Christian? Yes: (replies St. Bernard:) but the more commendable it is in a Christian, the more, to say the least of it, equivocal and doubtful it is in a libertine; and I ought, according to the precept of our Saviour, to beware of it as I should of the most dangerous and base hypocrisy.

Now what St. Bernard remarked in general, concerning the purity and regularity of morals, is still more particularly and sensibly verified with respect to communion. You know what came to pass: much was said, and with great reason, of abuses committed in the frequent use of the eucharistic sacrament, of the extreme facility with which it was to be feared that sinners were admitted to it, of the necessity of keeping from it for a limited time—of lukewarm souls who were not amended by it—of the discretion and prudence which the pastors of the church were bound to use in these respects. All this was good, holy, edifying; and I make no doubt—(be pleased to mind it)—I make no doubt, that true believers, affected with the interests of God and of his church had upright intentions in this extraordinary display of their zeal.

But to me it is amazing that persons of a quite different character, I mean your libertines and loose livers, should expect to be supposed of the same party; and, that making a common cause with those with whom they had nothing in common, they should be much the most strenuous and ardent in asserting the respect due to the sacrament of Christ and his adorable body. It is amazing that persons, thought by the most knowing to have but little religion, persons addicted to the greatest vices, should take upon them to talk with so much warmth against frequent communion, should so openly take offence at the least abatement, whether real or imaginary in this behalf, and should take part in the debate, as though it were a thing that nearly concerned them. All this is amazing.

For, whence can all this zeal arise? Impious as I suppose them, they harbour in their minds a secret contempt for every other Christian duty; and of this they talk in the spiritual language of the perfect and the godly. Therefore they must have some interested view, and you are too clear-sighted not immediatetly to discern in what this interested view consists; for, it is easily discoverable; and it is at least certain, that by so speaking they take to themselves the privilege of being libertines, not only with security, but, if I may venture to say it, with honour. For, these are they whom St. Paul describes in his epistle to Timothy; men of tainted principles, whose faith is extinct in a great measure, and to whom every religious exercise and practice is a heavy burden they would gladly shake off. As they know, however, that communion was always regarded as a special mark of Christianity, and that to renounce it openly would be a kind of apostacy, the disgrace of which would be painful to them: for fear of being exposed to that degree, and yet to get rid of a troublesome yoke, they screen with religion their want of religion, (I know not whether I explain my meaning,) and they pass for approvers of that maxim, which, through a sentiment of fear and respect, withholds us from Christ, to the end they may not be distinguished from even the most exact Christians, as they speak like them, and seem equally zealous.

Now I hold that this language in the mouth of the libertine is a scandal to the weak. You ask me why? Be attentive, if you please. Because it hath a tendency to two things equally pernicious; namely, to decry, indifferently, good and bad communions; to keep away souls not only from communion but universally from everything holy in religion.

1st. To decry indifferently good and bad communions. For, (as St. Chrysostom rightly argues,) if at all times there is danger of bringing true piety into disesteem by running down the false, much more so is it, if the self-made judge is a profane wretch, little solicitous whether he confound the one with the other; a wretch, who, more probably impeaches the one, for no other reason than that he is a secret enemy to the other; a wretch, who, far from taking precautions to sift out and separate the truth from falsehood, seems rather affected with a pruriency to destroy the truth by falsehood. Now what this father expressed concerning devotional duties, I may safely affirm (for experience confirms it) with regard to communion. If, by condemning bad communions, we must always be afraid of condemning good ones; much more so, when the officious inspector's perverted reason makes him disregard both good and bad, and have no scruple of prejudicing those by decrying these.

And, in reality, where tends the malignant zeal of impious, freethinking livers, who avail themselves of it to the great detriment of innumerable righteous and innocent souls? It tends to do that in the church of God which the children of the high priest, Heli, did in the temple of Jerusalem: they kept away the people from the holy sacrifice. A crime which the Almighty held in execration, and for which he cast them off: "The sin was very great, because they kept men from the sacrifice of the Lord;" (1 Kings ii.;) or, if you please, it tends to do that which the Pharisees did, when the Saviour of the world for that reason told with indignation: "Wo be to you, who shut out others from the kingdom of heaven; for ye neither go in yourselves, nor suffer them that are entering to go in." Matt. xxiii. This typifies what is every day done by a certain kind of men, who, having withdrawn, through obduracy of heart, from the divine mysteries, by which (according to the doctrine of St. Cyril) the kingdom of God is laid open to us, would, were it possible, exclude all others. To this are all their endeavours directed. And truly they succeed but too well, by carping and sneering at worthy men on account of communion; by censuring their lives; by blaming their conduct; by animadverting on every the slightest of their failings; by forgiving nothing, but charging them with everything. St. Augustin, notwithstanding his vast comprehension, did not disapprove of daily communion; but the rash worldling, blind and unskilled in

the things of God, shall condemn it boldly and without hesitation. It was the sincere and hearty wish of the last œcumenical council, to see frequent communion restored in the church; but the rash worldling would have it on the contrary be abolished and annihilated.

Think not, however, beloved hearers, that I mean by this to assert the rectitude of every kind of frequent communion. Some there are which I cannot but deplore, but the judging of which I leave to God: that is, there are frequent communions, but unprofitable, unbecoming, disedifying, and calculated to give scandal rather than edification. I said I left it to God to pass judgment on them; for as I should have the greatest horror of advancing aught that might seem to countenance such communions; so should I condemn myself for prevarication, should I blame communion, however frequent, if performed with fervour. Others dishonour, these glorify Christ; and as I should ever account those accursed who should ever approve of imperfect communion, the same shall I think of him who shall oppose what sanctifies souls, and redounds to the honour and glory of Christ. Who can pretend to say what numbers of righteous souls the evil spirit, by this sole artifice, hath kept from our altars? How he hath disturbed the brides of Christ in their holy communications with the heavenly bridegroom? How many communions, at which the angels would have rejoiced in heaven, hath he, as I may say, interdicted upon earth?

2ndly. Further: from neglect of communion the scandal passes, if care be not taken to fence against it, to the abandoning or retrenching of all the most holy practices in religion; and it is St. Chrysostom's second observation: For, admitting this counterfeit and mistaken humility as a rule of action, what dangerous consequences may not be drawn from it, and to what religious duties and observances is not a soul, though devoted to God, tempted to renounce? You are unworthy to present yourself at the table of Christ, (it is St. Chrysostom that speaks,) and are you worthy to set foot in the temple of God? Are you worthy to pray to and invoke God? Are you worthy to hear the word of God? Are you worthy to be admitted to penance, and to the tribunal of the mercy of God? Are you worthy, with his church, to sing the praises of God? Are you worthy to be present when the divine sacrifice is offered up to God? For the same reason, your duty obliges you to relinquish all this, and the sight of your unworthi-

ness, if I may so speak, should keep you in a kind of excommunication, which would cut you off from whatever is called Christian worship and duty.

Thus concluded this holy doctor; and to say nothing of virtuous souls, whose simplicity may be imposed upon by this delusion, this is the advantage which libertines would draw from it. They would be delighted with extending to all Christian obligations these words of the centurion, explained and wrested to their own sense: "Lord, I am not worthy." And as they employ them, libertines as they are, to seem humble and religious in not communicating; so going a step farther, they would gladly find out a handle to forsake our churches through respect, to discontinue the use of prayer through respect—to rid themselves of every duty through respect. Now this is the scandal that ought to have been opposed. Pardon me, if I speak of it with some vehemence: it is to promote the interests of Christ and religion. Let the prelates of the church promulgate laws, and give pastoral charges, in order to reform the abuse of communion, they do their duty, and I shall always respect them. Let the priests, entrusted with the cure of souls, labour all they can to find proper remedies for the growing evil, it is essential to their function, and for that it was that God appointed them. Let even the laity, according to the measure of the grace which God hath imparted to them, contribute thereunto, by beginning with themselves, before they extend their zeal to others, and I shall be edified at it. But that profane worldlings, bewildered and sightless in heavenly matters, perhaps destitute of divine faith, should take upon them to decide, to regulate, to disgrace with their errors and impiety, a case the most important in our holy religion, is what I shall always condemn and oppose with all my might.

Let us use our endeavours, beloved brethren—(it is to you, ye priests of the living God, and ministers of his altars, it is to you I address myself)—let us use our endeavours to prepare for the Lord a godly people. United by the sacred bond of charity, let us labour indefatigably to convert sinners, to perfectionate the righteous, to purify the faithful, with a view of making them worthy to receive the sacrament of Christ. This work it is that must take up our time; to this end it is, that our labours must tend. For I am bold enough to affirm, beloved brethren, that the church of God will never be sanctioned, nor Christianity reformed but by good

use of holy communion. Reason and refine as much as you please, you must always recur to these adorable words of our Saviour: "Unless ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, ye have no life in you." On the contrary, "he that eateth this bread, shall live for ever," shall live here in grace, and hereafter in glory.

SERMON XXIV.

ON PRAYER.

"*Behold a woman of Canaan, who came out of those coasts, saying: Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David! my daughter is grievously troubled by a devil.*" MATT. XV.

IF ever the force and efficacy of prayer were discovered in a sensible and striking manner, was it not, Christians, in the example which this passage of the gospel exhibits? It discovers (says St. Ambrose) even a God surprised and struck with admiration. He confounds the powers of hell and darkness; works miracles and exerts his powers in behalf of a foreigner who hath recourse to him; and who, though an idolater, ought to serve us as a pattern, and teach us how to pray. Surprised he was, and struck with admiration: "O woman, great is thy faith!" Matt. xv. Thus, Christ explains himself. And do not her faith and the fervour of her prayer seem to give him surprise and unusual emotion? He confounds the powers of hell and darkness, and works miracles. For, what petition doth this woman make? That he would cure her daughter, who was cruelly worried by the evil spirit; and the Son of God, by one word speaking, not only restored the possessed daughter to her right mind, but sanctified the mother: "Be it unto thee as thou wilt." Matt. xv.

Nothing, therefore, is more efficacious with God than prayer. And yet, beloved hearers, how comes it that we find him, by daily experience, not inclined to hear our petitions? That although we pray, he hears us not? And that although we ask, we obtain nothing? This is what I now am about to examine, and this is

to be the ground of the present discourse. It is a great subject, and of extreme consequence, and therefore deserving of particular reflection; for I mean to inculcate the most excellent of all sciences—that of using the most powerful means of salvation in a proper manner. I mean to let you know the inestimable method and divine art of obtaining admittance to the throne of God, and prevailing with him to send down upon us the most precious treasures of his holy grace. But in order to receive this gift of prayer, let us have recourse to prayer, and let us implore the divine aid in the usual form.

There is nothing more solidly established in religion, and in Christian theology, than the infallibility of prayer. Such is the force of it, (says St. Chrysostom,) that it renders, it should seem, the word of man equally powerful in a manner with the word of God. Equally powerful: for as God, with a word created all things: "He said, and they were made;" (Ps. cxlviii.;) so man need but ask, and all is granted him: "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." John xv. Every day we hear Christians complain of the little advantage that accrues from prayer. Nor is it surprising. For how do we say that prayer is infallible? We suppose, to that purpose, a holy prayer: we suppose it performed with all the conditions that ought to attend it, and that God requires from us when he promises to grant whatever we shall ask. Now this is a common defect in our prayers. They are defective in regard to the matter and the form: in regard to the matter, which is the thing we pray for; and in regard to the form, which is the manner of praying. This, St. James told the faithful of his time: "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss." James iv. We ask not, in fact, for that for which God would have us ask; and this is a defect as to the matter of prayer. Neither do we ask in the manner in which he would have us ask; and this is a defect as to the form of prayer. But let us put up our prayers like the woman of Canaan. Nothing more proper than her prayer to Christ. She asks him to cast out the devil from her daughter. Nothing more engaging. In her prayer she puts all the virtue in practice which can gain upon our Saviour and move his heart. I say, let us pray like this woman, else our prayers are fruitless. Either because we ask not for the things for which we ought to ask: or, because we ask not for them in the manner in which we ought to ask for them.

These are two lessons on which my duty obliges me to throw what light I can. Be attentive, Christians, and use your best endeavours to profit by them.

Part I. It is on the nature of the things which we ask of God, that the very essence, and of course the merit, the efficacy, and the virtue of prayer depends; and St. Chrysostom tells us, that it is by this rule we must call ourselves to an account for the small value which God sets on all the prayers we offer, and the little effect they have in his sight. And this is the admirable instruction which the gospel affords us by the example of the woman of Canaan. For observe, if you please, (and may I be allowed to explain myself in this manner,) that whereas this woman, prostrate at the feet of our blessed Saviour, beseeches him to deliver her daughter from the power of the devil that possesses her; we, on the contrary, influenced by a spirit directly opposite, beg of God every day what preserves in our souls the dominion of the devil—nay of many devils, of which we are unwilling to be dispossessed. What more is necessaay to make you comprehend why the Saviour of the world gives ear to this foreigner, and works in her favour a miracle of his omnipotence; and why, on the contrary, God is deaf to our supplications and rejects our prayers for the greatest part? Apply your minds, beloved Christians, to the sublime doctrines which this subject will give me a favourable opportunity of displaying, as it includes the most important points concerning your predestination.

I say we beg every day of God what preserves in our souls the dominion of Satan—because we beg of him things in our prayers, either prejudicial to salvation, or purely temporal and unprofitable for salvation; or even supernatural and divine graces, but which, seeing the manner in which we conceive them, and in which we desire them, far from sanctifying us, serve rather to seduce us and withhold and divert us from the way of salvation. These three positions I shall endeavour to explain with all the clearness and precision I am able.

1st. In our prayers to God we ask for things prejudical to salvation: the first obstacle which stops the course of the divine mercies. For we must not imagine, beloved hearers, that we are not, though Christians, addicted in practice to the irregularities of paganism. Now, if we may credit the pagans themselves, one of the irregularities of the pagans was to have recourse to their gods,

and to ask of them that which they would not have asked of an honest man; which they would not have asked openly in the temple, or at the foot of the altar without a blush—as the death of a relation whose estate they longed for, or of a competitor at whose credit and merit they repined and envied—the ward's inheritance which they meant to embezzle, and which they beheld with avaricious eyes. Such was the subject of their prayers. And, to give them more weight, they added the ceremonies of a superstitious worship, offerings, sacrifices, and corporal lustrations.

To us, all this appears enormous and senseless. But, beloved Christians, in condemning them do we not pronounce sentence against ourselves? If we compare their prayers with our own, are we less culpable? What do I say? Are we not more culpable to a great degree? For, in short, they were pagans, and these pagans adored not only vain and false, but even vicious and dissolute deities, according to their own belief. Now what was more natural, than to ask of such deities that which favoured their vices, and the corruption of their morals? Was it not almost a necessary consequence of their infidelity? But, Christian brethren, the God whom we serve is as pure and holy as he is powerful and great; a God as essentially an enemy to injustice and to all sin, as he is God. And yet of this God, so pure, so holy, so equitable and just, what do we ask? The accomplishment of our wishes and sensual desires, and the success of our base and criminal undertakings. This is miscalled an irregular proceeding: it is, I am bold enough to say it, an impiety, a sacrilege.

True it is, and I freely grant, that now a-days Christians have learned the method of giving their prayers a more specious appearance, and a better varnish, and of expressing them in terms not quite so invidious; for, modern dissimulation and artfulness are carried to the highest perfection. But, although we may impose upon our own weakness, we cannot deceive God Almighty who hears us, and sees us, and distinguishes between the malignity of our intentions and the simplicity of our expressions. To no purpose, therefore, doth the man of the world beg of God a subsistence suitable to his profession, and wherewithal to support him according to his rank: for as his rank, or rather the idea which he forms of his rank, is founded in the principles of an unbounded ambition, or rather an insatiable avarice, God's infinite penetration discovers his designs, counteracts his schemes, and defeats his

hopes. To no purpose doth the father of a family beg of God a settlement for his children in the world: for, as his views and schemes in their regard are profane and worldly, regulated neither by conscience nor by divine vocation, God Almighty overlooks the external appearance of an humble prayer, and knows its tendency; and, by a just judgment, far from raising this family to dignities, permits its ruin to all intents and purposes, letting it moulder away, or sink into obscurity. To no purpose doth the woman of the world beg of God health of body. For, whereas her health, considering the use to which she turns it, is productive only of sloth and idleness, of vicious delicacy, perhaps of libertinism and a disorderly life, God, who beholds it, instead of keeping back the weight of his arm, strikes the more severely, and deprives her in that habitual listlessness of what might feed her self-complacency, and flatter her vanity. To no purpose doth a man unjustly engaged in a law-suit, in which his whole fortune and dependence are at stake, beg of God to determine the cause in his favour: for as this law-suit is nothing, at bottom, but a covert injustice, maintained by chicanery, God Almighty, who knows it, in opposition to him espouses the cause of the widow and the orphan, and compels him to give up his pretensions with shame. Every means possible, however, are employed to move the will of God and procure his assistance. The very prayers, the very sacrifice of the church is interposed. But because this business, which is carried on so warmly, is nothing but the secret machinations of a junto, a wicked intrigue, which can succeed only to the detriment of their neighbour, God Almighty, the protector of the innocent and the poor, on this occasion rejects even the most holy prayers of the church, even the most adorable sacrament of the altar. These particulars, were I to set them forth in their full extent, would lead me too far. But were you, beloved hearers, to apply them to yourselves, you would soon perceive that hundreds of times your hearts have beguiled you in the same manner, and induced you to pervert the end of prayer, in order to obtain of God himself the gratification of your passions.

But to return to that on which I was discoursing, and to depict this matter in the strongest colours of which it is susceptible, give me leave, Christians, to dwell a little longer on the morals of the pagans. I said they were enough to work conviction; but I said too little, and I add that in one sense, even in this place, they are

more proper to put us to the blush than the doctrine of the fathers. Permit me, therefore, to make a profane author speak in this pulpit, and to impeach your conduct—either for your instruction, or for your confusion—as he did the manners of his own times in such spirited and energetic terms. Tell me, (says he,) deploring the abuses in ancient Rome, and upbraiding the false devotees of paganism, who importuned the gods with their unrighteous prayers; tell me your thoughts concerning Jupiter, and the place he holds in your estimation. Have you the same respect for the greatest of your gods as for the wisest of your magistrates. This question (continues he) surprises you. But I do not propose it without reason. For would you wait on this magistrate, whose virtue you revere, to offer him in his palace the infamous supplication which you make to Jupiter in the most awful of his temples? You, therefore, suppose Jupiter more liable to be corrupted, when you think him disposed to hearken to your prayers, and even ready to grant them a favourable hearing. Thus spoke a pagan upon this subject. In this sarcastic strain he reproached his fellow-subjects with the scandal of their religion, and perhaps was conducive to their reformation. Thus infidelity gives us wholesome lessons, and condemns the impropriety of our proceedings. Let us apply this to our own morals.

And what must our notions be of our God, the God of holiness? Is he the promoter of our vices? The accomplice of our crimes. Is it possible he could, or would be such? From this source, however, flow all our actions, and our behaviour towards him. For when I pray—take with you in your minds this remark of St. Chrysostom—when I pray I expect, that God in his mercy and paternal condescension will conform to my wishes; that his divine will, efficacious and all-powerful, shall coincide with mine which is nothing but weakness; and that he will accomplish my desires, which without his aid would be to no purpose. Put then the case, that blinded by the spirit and maxims of the world, far from praying in a Christian manner, I pray with a view to satisfy my ambition, my pride, my resentment, my revengeful heart—what do I do? I ask God to agree with me upon these heads; that is, I wish he would be vain like myself, passionate like myself, violent like myself; and that for me, who am his creature, he would vouchsafe to do that which he cannot do without ceasing to be God. Now to address our prayers to him in this manner, would

not be to pray to him as the God of heaven, but to dishonour in a high degree the most adorable of his attributes; it would be to make him, as far as on me depends, subservient to my iniquities, as he complains himself by the mouth of his prophet: "Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast put me to pain with thy iniquities." Isai. xliii. The expression is remarkable: "Thou hast put me to pain." As who should say: your prayer hath given me uneasiness; for, on one hand, I would gladly have been propitious to it; and, on the other, I could not give it a favourable hearing; my heart was according in a kind of fluctuation, and, as it were, divided between my holiness and my goodness: my goodness which took part with you, and my holiness which was against you; my goodness which inclined me to compassionate your distress, and my holiness which obliged me to reject your supplication: "Thou hast put me to pain with thy iniquities." And truly, Christians, if God in that case had made account of our prayers, would it not be a stumbling-block? Would it not make us call his providence in question?

I know that we have (as St. John informs us) the Son, a powerful advocate with the Father, and that we pray through the merits of this adorable Son. But to apply in particular to God made man what I said of God in a general way—would we make him the patron of our blind desires, by which we are swayed? And if this be not the sentiment by which we are impelled, why should we lay stress and dependence on his merits, in the prayers which our desires alone inspire?

Happy it is for you, that your gracious God, to obstruct your perdition, is inflexible to your prayers. In this seeming rigour you should acknowledge his mercy. What would become of you, were he more indulgent and more conformable to our inclinations? What hath been the ruin of, and what ruins daily, such numbers of families, but too vast and unlimited, nay, criminal wishes? What hath occasioned the eternal reprobation of so many Christians? Was it not the having obtained what God could not grant but in the excess of his wrath? And whence comes the loss of so many worldlings, who are damned amidst opulence, ease, and effeminacy, but from those supposed favours of God, who hears them and indulges the senseless desires of their heart, contrary to the designs of his amiable providence? You ask that of God which sooths your passion; and if he lends a favourable ear to your request, he who foresees that which will pervert you, that which

will corrupt you, that which will plunge you into the mighty gulf, what more rigorous punishment can be inflicted? What more dreadful vengeance can be exerted? But to proceed:

2ndly. If you do not ask always for things prejudicial, and with views directly contrary to salvation, you supplicate, at least, for things merely temporal and no way profitable to that end. I would not, however, be supposed to insinuate that the good things of this life are not the gifts of heaven, or that they are absolutely contrary to salvation. But when are they such—and on what account doth God refuse them? When we ask for them neither according to the order which himself hath established, nor relatively to the end which he hath pointed out to us.

In the first place, regardless of spiritual favours, we ask only for temporal ones, as the advantages of fortune, prosperity, tranquillity, all which terminate in the necessaries of life. These we desire, and these we seek; and these are desired and sought by infidels, as well as by us: "For, all these things do the heathens seek." Matt. vi. These are good things, I own: but they are perishable things—things of an order inferior to man, especially to a Christian man; dangerous things and liable to be perverted, though really good, into real evils. In regard to solid and incorruptible things, as purity of manners, a good conscience, humility, faith, the love of our neighbour, whatever may serve to sanctify the soul, and raise it to perfection, to our shame be it said, we supinely neglect and seldom revolve at the foot of the altar. Which of you hath ever had recourse to God with a view of becoming more moderate in his passions and more regular in his conduct? You visit the tombs of the martyrs, but why? To be cured of a distemper, not to be delivered from a temptation. You invoke the saints, but why? To be more happy and more opulent, not more humble and more an enemy to pleasures. Ah! cries Salvian, if we groan under the pressure of public calamities; if the land be threatened with famine or pestilence; if the people be swept away by a raging mortality, we run precipitately and in crowds to the temple of the living God, and our sighs, lamentations, and prayers are heard in every corner. But though unbridled libertinism dishonours Christianity, and brings grief to the church, we enjoy tranquillity and a peaceful mind. Instead of praying that heaven would put a stop to scandalous impieties, we suffer our days to pass in quietness and a dreadful indolence.

Thus we pray like the wretched Antiochus, whose selfish prayer was unable to find grace in the presence of God: "This wicked man prayed unto the Lord, of whom he was not to find mercy." Mach. ix. He prayed, neither can it be denied that he prayed with all possible ardour; he prayed, but he prayed in a worldly way; he prayed, but asked not for the spirit of penitence, or the gift of piety, or respect for the sacred things he hath profaned, but for health which he preferred to all the rest and of which he was fond to a great degree: "This wicked man prayed unto the Lord," but the Lord shut the bowels of his mercy against him. We, too, pray in the same manner; but God never promised to warrant such prayers. Examine the gospel, and you will there find the reason of it.

Christ says to his disciples: "If you shall ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it you." John xvi. But observe (says St. Augustin) these words, any thing, by which our Saviour lets us understand that what we ask in his name should be something, and something worthy of him, because it were improper, in the other supposition, that he should exert and manifest his power in our behalf. Now all the good things of the world together, considered disjunctively from eternal bliss, are as nothing in the presence of Almighty God. To ask, therefore, of God in this manner, is to ask for nothing; and although the promise of Christ is general, or should seem to be so, they are not by themselves comprised therein. In order to be convinced of it, hear what he adds, speaking to the apostles: "Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name." John xvi. And, indeed, to remain in his presence on Thabor was a delightful sensation of which St. Peter desired the continuance. To possess in his kingdom the chief places, was, according to the meaning of those two disciples, a vain honour which their ambition grasped at, because they beheld it through a false medium. But the zeal of souls, constancy in persecution, and self-denial, were the essential favours of which they stood in need, as no other favours could uphold and animate them, and raise them to perfection in their apostolic functions. For these, however, it never entered into their heads to petition their Master: "Hitherto ye have asked nothing."

Now, of how many Christians might I not at this day make the same complaint? And of those who hear me, to how many might I not have just cause to say for the same reason: O man of the

world, thou hast hitherto petitioned thy God for nothing, forasmuch as thou hast not, in thy sinful state, petitioned him for thy conversion, for an humble mind, for a contrite heart, for the grace to renounce thy evil habits, and to stifle and conquer thy vicious inclinations? This, however, was the signal grace, the grace of graces which thou oughtest to have asked for and sought with all diligence.

Further: when the Saviour of the world assures us, in the gospel, that whatever we shall ask in his name shall be granted, he supposes we shall ask according to the rule which he hath himself laid down. For, as Tertullian well observes, it is he himself who regulates prayer, and quickens it with his Spirit, communicating to it the special power and privilege of penetrating into the highest heaven, and moving to compassion the heart of God, by laying before his all-seeing eyes the weaknesses and miseries of mankind. Now what is that rule, that divine rule by which Christ Jesus commands us to pray? Seek first, says he, the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and you shall want for nothing. Ask of my Father the sanctification of his name, the coming of his kingdom, the fulfilling of his will, not the material bread which serves for aliment, and then will I assist you. But if you run counter to this regulation, and, by an attachment to the world unbecoming your profession, you seek earthly bread before the kingdom of God, put your affiance no longer in my merits, however infinite, as your prayer how fervent soever it may be is not calculated according to the plan which I have sketched: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." Matt. vi. Not but we may ask for temporal blessings: the church herself is wont to do so. But let us ask for them like the church; let us ask for them after having first, and above all things, asked for spiritual favours; let us ask for the blessing conferred on Jacob and not on Esau. What a noble allegory doth the example of these two brothers exhibit! Mind the application I make of it to my subject. They had each to his share the dew af heaven and the fat of the earth. Where lies the difference; and by what special sign doth the scripture make appear the election of Jacob and reprobation of Esau? Ah! Christians, by this—that in the blessing conferred on Jacob, the dew of heaven is expressed antecedently to the fat of the earth: "God give thee of the dew of heaven and fatness of the earth;" whereas in the other, the fat of the earth is mentioned previously to the dew

of heaven: "In the fatness of the earth and in the dew of heaven from above shall be thy blessing." Gen. xxvii.

This is what every day happens among us, and what discriminates prayers truly Christian from those which are not. A righteous man and a worldly-minded man put up their prayers in the same church, and before the same altar; but one prays righteously, and the other like a worldling. How? Doth one beg only the influence of grace, and the other nothing but earthly advantages? No: for it may so happen that the righteous man, with the influence of grace shall supplicate sometimes for an increase of fortune, as well as the worldly man; and that the worldly man shall ask with an increase of fortune the influence of grace, as well as the righteous man. But the worldly man, instigated by the spirit of the world, places an increase of fortune before the influence of grace, "the fatness of earth and the dew of heaven;" but the righteous man, prompted by the Spirit of God, prefers the influence of grace to an increase of fortune, "the dew of heaven and the fatness of the earth." He says to God: Lord, sanctify me; make me chaste, charitable, merciful, patient; give me the dew of heaven, and grant me forthwith the good things of this life, so far as they may conduce to my eternal welfare; give me the fatness of the earth. But the worldly man says: "Lord, make me rich, great, powerful; give me the fatness of the earth; neither refuse me the grace which is necessary to the leading of a virtuous life—give me the dew of heaven. An accursed prayer, which when we offer up, it is not to be wondered at, that God should reject it and hold it in execration.

3rdly. But let us proceed to the fountain-head; and, in order to discover on what rests the important doctrine I am expounding, take this sound principle of St. Cyprian with you: that your prayers have no virtue, but inasmuch as they are united with the intercession of Christ. For, it is only of Christ that we can say with St. Paul: "He was heard for his own reverence." Heb. v. When the Almighty hears us, it is not in consideration either of what we are or of what we merit, as we are nothing of ourselves and can merit nothing; but in consideration of his only begotten Son, who prayed for us before we could pray for ourselves. Taking this for granted, how can those prayers, by which we petition for the things of this world in preference to heaven be acceptable to God, whereas, in that case they have no conformity or connexion with the prayers of the God-man who became our Mediator? What did he ask for us?

You know it well. That we might be united by the bond of charity, "that we might be one;" (John xvii.;) that, without ostentation or dissimulation, we might be sanctified in truth; that, living in the midst and hurry of the world, according to our vocation and situation in life, we might have over ourselves a watchful eye, and be fortunate enough to keep clear of its iniquity: "I pray not," says our Redeemer, "that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from evil." John xvii. But what is our practice? We ask Almighty God for riches, honours, a vain reputation, an easy life; and without asking for them after salvation, or relatively to salvation, we ask for those riches, to wallow in plenty; for these honours, to make a figure in the world; for this reputation, to be known and distinguished; for this easy life, to enjoy the sweets of it; that is, we ask for those things for which our Saviour never meant to ask. And why did he not ask for them? Mind this reason. Because (says St. Cyprian) he could not but pray conformably to the end for which he was sent. Now he was sent as a Saviour, and his mission regarded the salvation only of mankind. It was, therefore, for the salvation only of mankind that he could labour, that he could suffer, that he could merit, and, by a necessary consequence, it was for the salvation only of mankind, and for whatever bore relation thereto, that he could pray.

Wherefore, Christians, you ask but obtain not, because you ask not with Christ our Lord, and because, were your prayers, independently of this, capable to produce the intended consequence, you might say that favours were conferred on you without your being indebted to your Redeemer for them, which were blasphemy, according to the maxims of our religion. And on this basis it is that St. Augustin rests his argument, when he proves so solidly, that the things of this life are by no means the object of Christian hope. Let no one deceive himself, (says this holy doctor,) and vainly promise himself temporal felicity, because he appertains to Christ our Lord. Christ did not choose us for that end, nor call us to faith on that condition. Without failing in his word, he may leave us in poverty, debasement, and sufferings. True it is, he engaged his word to present our prayers before the throne of God; but he supposed we should pray, like Christians, for heaven where he placed our inheritance. And this excellent way of reasoning the same father made use of afterwards in oppo-

sition to the raillery of the pagans. You object to us, (says he,) that notwithstanding our prayers, we live in indigence and want of all things. But to wipe off thoroughly this reproach, and to justify our God, suffice it to say, that when we put up our prayers to heaven, we pray not precisely for the things appertaining to this life, but to eternity. If therefore, we are poor and needy in this world, the distressful situation in which we live, not only is no proof that our prayers are unprofitable, but gives us an assurance that the fruit of them is reserved for an immortal life.

Such was the reply of the great St. Augustin, which he concludes with a reflection extremely affecting. In this (says he) we should admire the liberality of our God. He limits not his favours to the things of this world, because they are beneath us; because they are insufficient to satisfy our desires; because they are disproportionate to the nobleness of our being, and to the worth of our prayers. He would not put us in the category of children, who are pleased with trifles, and things of no moment; nor in that of idolaters, whose moral virtues he rewards in this life with apparent happiness. He will himself be our happiness—our reward. Ah! my brethren, let us therefore beware of mistaking in the choice of the things we ask. Let us place our confidence in the word of our God, who hath faithfully promised that he himself will be our reward; and as he hath promised, let us only petition that he would give himself to us. Many there are, St. Augustin tells us, who hope in God, but who hope for everything except God. Let us dread a separation so disadvantageous to us; and, as we hope for nothing but from the hand of God, let us hope for nothing but God, or things relating to God.

4thly. But I ask not for temporal favours of God; my prayers are offered up for supernatural grace—the grace of salvation; and yet I have it not. No, beloved hearers, you have it not I know; because even in that respect you are guilty of a third abuse in prayer, which perhaps you perceive not, but which I now shall make appear and lay before you.

It is this; that instead of regarding prayer as the instrument which God hath put into our hands in order to procure the true grace of salvation, that is real and possible grace—grace regulated and proportionally adjusted to the divine appointment; we employ it for the imploring of chimerical grace, superfluous grace—grace adapted to our own taste and mistaken notions. My meaning is

this: we pray, and as we think with a true desire of obtaining salvation; but by a blind confidence, we rely on prayer, as though it were sufficient without good works; as though all depended on it; as though Christ Jesus in commanding us to pray, did not also command us to watch and do good; as though there were graces which might and should save us without our own co-operation. We pray, and ask the grace of a good death, persuaded that no more than to pray is required; and thus we remain without care or solicitude, or the trouble to merit it or to prepare for it by a good life. We pray, and ask the grace of penance and sanctification; but the grace we ask is for the future only; grace which should remove all difficulties and dangers, and leave no laborious endeavour to be made or obstacle to be surmounted; miraculous grace which should transport us like St. Paul, and not dispose us by little and little, and oblige us to proceed; grace which should accompany us wherever we went, which should be ready at hand on all occasions; which should allow us to expose ourselves to every kind of hazard, and not grace which it should import us to attend to watchfully, and make the best advantage of. That is, in short, we ask for grace that would change the whole order of divine providence, and annul the dispensation by which our eternal lot is ascertained.

And now, Christians, let us close this first part with the prophet's prayer: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord." Ps. xxvi. For (adds St. Augustin) I now perceive and thoroughly comprehend the reasons that induced you so often to reject the prayers of your servant. In order to answer the designs of your mercy I should have put up my prayers for things not common to me, and to pagans, and to impious men. You wanted that my prayers should distinguish me from the enemies of your holy name. Nevertheless I find that between their prayers and mine the difference was, that they for the most part obtained their request, and you generally refused me the things I petitioned for, either because they were contrary in themselves to salvation, or I asked not for them with a view to salvation. But in this, O Lord, I confess you favoured me; because those favours would have drawn me to perversion, whereas the paternal scourge of your justice hath been my amendment. By being happy in the world, I should have forgotten you the more easily; and if my wishes had been crowned with

prosperity, I should have trodden in the footsteps of bad men. Accordingly, my God, far from complaining that you gave me the denial, I bless your holy name and reckon it as a favour that you heard me not according to the desires of my heart, but according to the order which your wisdom had established, and my salvation required. But henceforward, my God, you will hear my supplications, because they will only be offered up for things appertaining to eternity; because among the graces of salvation which I shall ask, I shall ask only for those which may be profitable to me—which may operate the most securely, and which may lead me the most directly to everlasting bliss. Thus, beloved Christians, the words of Jesus Christ will be fulfilled in our regard: we shall ask and shall receive. Whereas we receive not, either because we ask not for the things for which we ought to ask, as you have seen in the first part; or because we ask not for them in the manner in which we ought to ask for them, as I shall show you in the second.

Part II. If God hears my prayers, it is on certain necessary and essential conditions. But, beloved hearers, in what manner soever he is pleased to deal by us, and in his providential wisdom to dispose and order things, it would be a gross error to suppose that the conditions required to the due performance of prayer were an obstacle to our wishes, and a motive which God used to refuse us his gifts. Ah! (cries St. Augustin) heaven forbid we should ever entertain or admit such notions, as nothing is more contrary to the goodness of God! He who does not stop (according to the scriptures) the course of his mercies, at the very time that we provoke him to anger: "Will he in his wrath keep in his mercies?" (Ps. lxxvi.) he who (according to the royal prophet) waits not for our prayers but beholds them, hearkening to mere desires: "Our Lord hath heard the desire of the poor;" (Ps. x.;) he who is so tender of us as to be affected with the very preparation of the heart: "The preparation of the heart thy ear hath heard;" (Ps. x.;) will he (if I may venture so to speak) be uncomplying when we invoke him with affection and sincerity? So far is he from availing himself of his greatness in the intercourse which he permits us to have with him by prayer, that we ought to confide that he will too indulgently and with too great condescension pass by our weaknesses, frailties, and imperfections. It cannot be denied that prayer, to be efficacious, should have certain qualities; but herein I maintain

we cannot say that God withdraws his promises or withholds his graces. The reason is, that of these qualities there is not one which will not, on examination, be found easy in practice; not one of which the necessity is not justified by right reason; not one which is not required in a proportional degree between man and man; and (as I have already observed to you) not one of which the woman of Canaan hath not given us an example, and is not represented as a striking model. For, in short, (says St. Chrysostom, in the excellent homily which he composed on this subject,) what conditions doth God require for the infallibility of prayer? Humility, confidence, perseverance, attention of mind, and affection of heart. Now is there anything in all this, I do not say impracticable or impossible, but painful or burdensome?

1st. Is anything more reasonable or even more natural, than to pray with the disposition of an humble mind? Is it possible to have a just idea of prayer, and forget this fundamental rule in our prayers? Do we otherwise offer our petitions to the princes and monarchs of the earth? Do we think it a hardship when we ask for favours, to pay homage and respect? And, if by this homage and this respect we compass our designs, do we murmur or complain as though our submission was ill bestowed? Do we say that they prize their favours too high, when they refuse them to the rash audacious man who demands them haughtily? And why should we make that objection to God, as it is much more reasonable, and consequently more easy to humble ourselves in his presence than in the presence of a man? Did the woman of Canaan make a difficulty to fall prostrate at the feet of Christ Jesus, and to pay him adoration? Was it a mighty effort to confess her unworthiness in that posture? And did she deem it a hardship to bear the repulse to which she was exposed? No, no, (says the Saviour of the world,) "it is not good to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs." Matt. xv. Could any comparison be more humiliating? But however humiliating it may be or seem to be, doth it seem to affect or afflict this woman? What do I say? Doth she not acknowledge the truth of those words by making the application of them to herself: "Yea, Lord?" Matt. xv.

Such was this woman's way of praying: but which is ours? She was a pagan, and the pagan humbles herself: we are Christians, and bring with us to prayer a spirit of pride which we

cherish in our breasts, at the same time that we are going to acknowledge our miseries and wants. And because this spirit hath dominion over us, we pray with presumption, as if God was obliged to consider us particularly, to treat us with distinction, and make account of our prayers. To say nothing of the ostentation which too frequently accompanies our offerings, and which instead of prevailing on God to hear us, induces him to punish us: to say nothing of the luxury we bear about us and display even in the house of God—of the grandeur and self-sufficiency we retain there; of the vain attitudes and artful negligence we affect there, directly contrary to the manner of a suppliant; all which (according to the sacred text) makes our prayers abominable in the sight of God, as he hates nothing more than "the poor man proud." Waving a detail of these matters, we ask favours of God—but we ask them as due; which if he graciously deign to grant we are puffed up and elated, but which if he refuse we murmur and complain. We ask them, and having received them, forget who it was that granted them. We employ them and use them without referring them to him. Can we then be surprised that he should have no bowels of compassion for us? Would it not be to dispense his favours and graces with a lavish hand—to bestow them indifferently on the proud and the humble?

2ndly. Is anything more just than to pray with sentiments of a lively confidence? It is our sovereign Lord, our gracious God, who in his infinite mercy will be prayed to in that manner, and declares himself glorified by such confidence; who in a thousand places of the inspired writings attributes rather to it than to the divine mercy, (take not offence at this assertion, it is sound and orthodox,) when I say rather than to his very mercy the miraculous virtue and efficacy of prayer; not saying to those who have recourse to him and call upon him: it is my goodness and my power—but it is thy faith and thy confidence which hath been thy salvation: "Thy faith hath made thee whole." How could he have proposed a more advantageous condition? Did not the Canaanite, though an infidel, directly accept it? That openness of heart which she discovered to Christ by speaking to him in person: "Have mercy on me, O Lord;" (Matt. xv.;) that tender and affectionate motive which she used, with a view to move him, by calling him "Son of David;" those cries which she redoubled in proportion as the apostles reprimanded her importunity and

commanded her to be silent: "Send her away, for she crieth after us;" (Matt. xv.;) that confidence with which she disclaimed all pretensions to the bread on the table, provided they furnished her with the crumbs that fell from it: that is, (according to St. Jerom's explanation,) to be resigned to, and content with the slightest efforts of our Saviour's power, convinced that it would be enough for the miraculous deed which she beseeched him to perform: "For the whelps partake of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." Matt. xv. Did not all this proceed from a soul that sincerely trusted in the God she invoked? What would she have done if, already a Christian, she had known Christ Jesus as perfectly as we do? If, instead of knowing him for the Son of David, she had known him for the Son of the living God? And yet is it not true that, notwithstanding all the ideas with which our religion furnisheth us of this God-man, scarce ever do we pray to him in that simple but heroical manner which the apostle hath marked out; I mean with faith, and without any doubt: "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering." James i.

Although Christ Jesus is so powerful to assist us, and although to overcome our incredulity and diffidence he engaged himself to us by the most solemn oath, swearing by himself; he who could not (as St. Paul testifies) have sworn by anything greater than himself; yet our diffidence and incredulity are more prevalent and carry it. We believe a man on his bare word, and we believe not the promise of God. We pray, but are inwardly at the same time disturbed; harbour vain disquietudes and carking agonies, and give ourselves up to a secret despondency. We have recourse to God, but always in extremity and when every other means of relief hath failed. We depend not so much on God as on ourselves, and place greater reliance on our prudence than our prayers. A strange infatuation, which St. Ambrose deplored, and which thoroughly manifests God's displeasure, when he withdraws his arm, and will not stretch it forth to our aid and relief.

3rdly. Is anything more expedient than to pray with perseverance? Is not God master of his own gifts? Who but himself hath power to dispose of them? Cannot he put them at what prices he pleases? And are not his graces sufficiently precious to be frequently asked and sought with perseverance? When Christ by his silence made trial of the woman I have mentioned from the gospel, "who answered not a word;" (Matt. xv.;) when he seemed

by a severe and mortifying refusal inclined to neglect her and banish her from his presence; and when in her hearing he told the apostles that he was not sent for her: "I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel;" (Matt. xv.;) did she cease, on that account to pray, to solicit, to press with earnestness? No, Christians; the resistance of Christ increased her perseverance, and her perseverance outdid the resistance of Christ. The mystery was soon unfolded to her. She quickly comprehended the designs and inclinations of this God and Saviour; and seeing the necessity (as I may say) she was under of urging him, and even urging him by opposing real earnestness to seeming harshness, she broke through, in some measure, the laws of Providence; she deserved, though a foreigner, to be treated like an Israelite; she obtained a double miracle—the deliverance of her daughter from the evil spirit, and her own conversion to the true faith. O the charity of my bountiful God, (cries one of the fathers,) how adorable in your dissimulations and in the stratagems which you use to combat, in appearance, the very persons for whom in fact you combat. Wherefore, despair not, (adds he,) O Christian, who have begun to struggle with your God in prayer; for that kind of violence he loves to suffer, and it gives him pleasure to be disarmed by your hand. Neither must we imagine, (concludes he) my brethren, that this God of mercy can be invincible against us, who became, by a most astonishing prodigy, "weak, even unto death," upon our account.

Such were the sentiments of the ancient fathers upon this head. But we, you well know, being influenced by an error directly opposite, hurried into the devious ways by frivolousness and volatility of mind, yield to God against his will. We yield to him, when he wishes, himself, to yield to us. We grow weary of telling him that we are poor, distressed, and in need of his assistance; and yet he is much pleased with our importunity. Assiduity of this kind is tiresome to us, provokes our patience, and causes disgust. We would have it be enough to present ourselves once. Delay appals us; and often on the point of obtaining our wishes, we lose all the merit and advantage of them. And tell me, at whose door ought the fault to be laid—at God's, or at our own?

4thly. In fine, is anything more necessary and essential in our prayers to God, than attention of mind and affection of heart? I shall conclude with this point, which of all is much the most im-

portant. Attention of mind and affection of heart are what I call, with St. Thomas, the soul of prayer, without which it cannot any more subsist than a body without a soul, to quicken it and give it motion. For, what is prayer? Let us not here examine theological definitions, but the dictates of reason and good sense, and the common notions which mankind have of this holy exercise. What, then, is prayer? A conversation with God, in which the soul admitted and, if I may so express myself, introduced into the sanctuary, lays her wants before the Deity, represents her weaknesses, discovers her temptations, begs pardon for her unfaithfulness. And doth not all this suppose mental recollection, and inward sentiment? If, therefore, it so happen, that while I treat with God, my mind so wanders as absolutely and voluntarily to lose this internal attention and devotion, whatever else I may be said to do—I cannot be said to pray. Although I should sing laud and glory to the Lord; although I should spend whole days and nights at the foot of the altar; although, after the expression and example of David, I should be as it were fixed and glued to the ground—if I cease to be attentive, I cease to pray. And from hence, Christians, the angelical doctor made three deductions, to which I shall not make any addition, but which I earnestly beseech you to ponder for your edification. They will fully set forth the reasons why our prayers are disregarded and inefficacious in the presence of God.

The first deduction. As it cannot be denied that attention is essentially requisite to prayer, we may say with great reason, but with still greater sorrow, that the exercise of it is, as it were, annihilated in the Christian world; because, if sometimes we seem to pray, it is without reflection. For, to what is all our piety reduced? To some prayers which we say with a dissipated and almost always absent mind. We move the lips, not like the godly mother of Samuel, on whom Heli, the high priest, passed so rash a judgment, but like the Jewish people, to whom God objected that their hearts were far from him while they praised him with their mouths. Thus our prayers are mostly hypocritical, and our blessed Saviour might well say to us what he said to the pharisees: "Ye hypocrites, well did Isaias prophecy of you, saying; this people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." Matt. xv. This disorder is not peculiar to the lower sort of people, whose intellectual coarseness is unhappily such, that day by

day they say their prayers without praying, that is, without thinking either of what they say or of what they ask; nor to the devout sex, who, though addicted to prayer, make it their business to say a great deal without fixing the natural levity of their minds, or being at much pains to apply attentively. Men the most enlightened and the best instructed, men consecrated to God, the very ministers of God, by a deplorable perversion, from a habit of praying, pray not at all, and, instead of perfecting, corrupt and destroy so holy a practice.

The second deduction. As prayer essentially includes attention, it follows that attention is, itself, of precept in those prayers which are strictly enjoined us. So that to pronounce the words is not then sufficient, but that a remarkable and voluntary evagation of mind should be looked upon as a grievous and deadly offence. Now this, my brethren, I say both on your account and my own, for that one of the principal engagements of your profession and mine consists therein, and for that vocal prayer is a kind of attribute which the church requires of us every day. And, indeed, it were strange that this action, in itself so holy—an action that naturally leads to holiness—should serve to condemn us, and that the origin of grace should be the source of reprobation. Nor let it be forgotten, that when we submitted to the obligation of reciting the Divine Office, we bound ourselves to perform an act of religion; that an act of religion is not a practice merely external; and that as the church, by enjoining confession enjoins contrition, so she enjoins attention by enjoining prayer. Whether this obligation arises from the precept of the church immediately, as some very able divines maintain, or from the precept naturally conjoined with that of the church, in virtue of which God commands us to perform holily and worthily the thing prescribed, as others imagine: however it be, the difference is only a scholastic question; and in either opinion we equally violate the laws of religion. Ah! my brethren, let us not draw down that curse upon us with which the prophet, in the excess of his zeal, threatened the sinner, when he said: "Let his prayer become sin." And is it not probable that this is applicable to numbers of those who attend at the altar? With far greater reason ought we to accuse ourselves than the great St. Augustin, who condemned himself for negligence in this behalf.

The third and last deduction. God, therefore, with justice, rejects our prayers, as they resemble nothing so little as prayer—and

as, far from honouring him, they are offensive to him and irritate him against us. For, what an injustice, beloved hearers! You expect that God will take heed of your prayers, when you chose to pray, and are heedless yourself of the words you utter. You say with the prophet: "O Lord, give ear unto my words, hearken to the voice of my prayer, (Ps. v.,) and suffer your mind at the same time to rove through various and useless objects. You desire him to speak to you, and you speak not to him; you desire him to hearken to you, and you hearken not to him: you hearken not to yourself, you wilfully distract yourself.

Let us only reform, beloved Christians, in this one point, and a thorough reformation of life will ensue; for, according to St. Augustin, "he knows how to live well who knows how to pray well." Why are we subject to so many lapses? Either because we pray not at all, or not as we should; and this, because we are unwilling to relinquish our inordinate ways, and fear to be led into the right path. Let us ask things of God worthy both of him and of ourselves, and in a manner worthy both of him and of ourselves. In a word, let us ask him as we ought to do, for graces and favours and we shall obtain them; but, above all, let us ask for the gift of prayer. Let us say like the apostle, Lord teach us to pray; our weakness is such that we cannot, without you, lay our wants before you, or implore your assistance in a proper manner. It is only yourself that can make us efficaciously feel our wants, that can bring us to the foot of your altar with a view to represent to you; that can inspire us with words and sentiments proper to move your heart. Give us, therefore, my God, yourself, that knowledge so necessary for us; and by a special grace in which are included, as in their origin, all the other graces, teach us to use prayer in order to procure the graces of conversion, of sanctification, of salvation, which may lead us to the mansions of eternal repose.

SERMON XXV.

ON THE THOUGHTS OF DEATH.

Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return. GEN. iii.

THIS is the end, beloved Christians, to which all the designs of mankind, and all the pomp of worldly greatness must come at last; this is that which at all times and on all occasions should engross our thoughts. Remember this, whoever ye be, rich or poor, great or vulgar, kings or subjects—in a word, ye men all in general and each in particular: remember, that ye are but dust, and that unto dust ye must return. This remembrance will be displeasing to you; this thought will hurt, will disturb and afflict you; but by hurting you, it will cure you—by disturbing and afflicting you, it will be salutary, and, perhaps, as salutary will at length be supportable, nay comfortable and agreeable. Be that as it may, I purpose to show you in this discourse, the chief advantages accruing from it.

O thou holy Spirit, who with fire didst purify the prophet's lips, and madest them serve as an organ to the adorable word, purify my tongue, and make me worthily fulfil the sacred ministry with which thou hast entrusted me. Banish far from me whatever bears no relation to thee. Inspire me with no thought but what is proper to affect, to persuade, to convert. Give me as thou gavest the apostle of the Gentiles, not a fruitless eloquence, an eloquence of which the end is to satisfy the curiosity of men; but a Christian eloquence, which drawing its virtue from the precepts of the Gospel hath energy sufficient to work upon consciences, to sanctify souls, to gain sinners over, and to make them yield to the dominion of the law. Prepare the minds of my hearers to receive the lights of grace which thou shalt please to communicate to me. And whereas in speaking to them, I should have nothing in view but the salvation of their souls, grant that they hearken to me with that sincere desire of salvation which I am endeavouring to inculcate: an essential disposition for the receiving of all those graces and blessings which they must expect from thy bountiful hand.

The very pagan philosophers are agreed in this, that the capital science or study of life, is the science or study of death; and that it is impossible for man to lead a regular life, or walk steadily in the path of virtue, unless he frequently revolve in his mind, that die he must. Now I find that our life, or to speak more properly, whatever is susceptible of perfection in our life by reason and faith, is reducible to our passions, our deliberations, and our actions. My meaning is this: in the course of life we have passions to govern, we have resolutions to take, and we have duties to fulfil. And this to use a Scripture phrase, is every man: I mean every rational and Christian man. We have passions to subdue, by repressing their sallies, and moderating their violence; we have resolutions to take, by which we must guard against present mistakes and their natural consequence—future repentance; we have duties to fulfil, the performance of which must be speedy and fervent. Now for all this, Christians, I hold that the thoughts of death are sufficient, and to that purpose I advance the three following propositions, which I earnestly recommend to your serious attention, as they make the division of this discourse.

First, the thoughts of death are the most efficacious and sovereign remedy for curbing our passions. Secondly, the thoughts of death are the best and surest rule to direct us in our deliberations. Thirdly, the thoughts of death are the most effectual and powerful means to inspire us with a holy fervour in our actions.

Of these three verities I purpose to convince you, by making you perceive the whole force of these words of my text, "dust thou art, and unto dust thou shall return." You are hurried and borne away by the tide of passion, which you cannot stem, but seem to yourself unable to command your ambition and lust: remember what in reason ought to be the ambition and lust of a man who must yield to death. You deliberate upon a matter that nearly concerns you, a matter of consequence, and are unsettled in mind as to your resolution: remember the resolution which befits a man that must yield to death. You find religious observances fatiguing and disgustful, and you acquit yourself but negligently and tepidly of your duty: remember how important the performance of his duty is for a man who must yield to death. This is the use to which we must turn our thoughts upon death, and is the subject of your present instruction.

Part I. In order to extinguish the fire of our passions, we must

begin by knowing them; and to know them perfectly, St. Chrysostom tells us, no more is requisite than that we comprehend three things; namely, that they are vain, that they are insatiable, and that they are unjust. That they are vain, with respect to the objects to which they tend; that they are insatiable and without bounds, and therefore incapable of being satisfied themselves, or of satisfying us; that they are unjust in the presumptuous sentiments with which they inspire us, when thinking arrogantly of our own worth, we pretend to be distinguished and raised above others. You see what the passions, according to St. Chrysostom, particularly consist of. In order, therefore, to repress their sallies and irregular motions, there was something wanting which might display their vanity to us in a clear manner; which, submitting them to the law of a sovereign necessity, might limit them within us against our will; and which, by overlooking all distinction, might reduce them to the laudable principle of modesty, that is, to that equality which God hath ordained among all mankind, and might oblige us, whoever we be, to do ourselves justice, and to do others the duties of charity. Now these, beloved hearers, are the wonderful effects which the remembrance and thoughts of our final dissolution produce infallibly in our souls, actuated by the spirit of God. Give attentive ear, and let no part escape you of so edifying an instruction.

1st. Our passions are vain; and to be convinced of it, there needs no more than to form an idea of the vanity of the objects to which they tend. This alone must extinguish the fire of bad inclinations which they kindle in our hearts, and it is the great and important lesson which the Holy Ghost dictates in the book of wisdom. For let us own, Christians, although to our shame, that so long as the baubling things of this world seem great in our eyes, and we think them such, it is morally impossible not to have a love for them—and by making them the object of our love, not to make them an incentive to our passions. Though reason should oppose, though the law should forbid, though conscience and religion should combine to dissuade, our inordinate affections get the better in the strife; and, prepossessed with the specious appearance of what flatters and seduces us, we pass over unnoticed every other consideration, following only the attraction of that which beguiles us. If sometimes we resist, and if, in obedience to the will of heaven, we gain over ourselves occasional victories,

they are no more, on account of the violence they cost us, than forced victories. Our passion still subsists; and the mistake that the things which the world idolizes are solid and capable of making us happy, inspires us with an extreme desire of acquiring them, with immoderate complacency in the possessing of them, and with a deadly fear in the apprehension of losing them. To have but little afflicts us; to have much delights us; we are alarmed and dejected, in proportion as we are deprived of these worldly enjoyments. The reason is, that our imaginations, being deceived and perverted, represent them as things essentially good, things on which our happiness depends.

In order to wean our affections from them, according to Saint Chrysostom, the sure and infallible method is to undeceive ourselves. For, the moment we have a clear conception of their vanity, this weaning of our affections becomes easy to us, and in some shape natural. We are out of the reach, if I may so speak, of ambition and avarice. Far from endeavouring with eagerness and assiduity to procure advantages by indirect means, and illicit practices, being convinced of their futility, it is with some difficulty we prevail on ourselves to give a reasonable attention to the things of which we are lawfully possessed; and of this the ground is, that, taking for granted such conviction, the things of this world scarce deserve our care, much less our disquietude. Now whence arises such salutary conviction? From the remembrance of death, painted in the mind, and piously considered in the principles of faith. For, in our regard, continues St. Chrysostom, death evidently and plainly displays the inanity of the sublunary things which so strongly move us and engage our solicitude. It is death that makes us sensible of it; all other things deceive us. Death is the mirror which represents, without disguise, the general instability, the constant fluctuation, the daily decay of all earthly things; and the darksome grave makes a source of light by which our intellectual powers and our sensesare f eelingly affected. In that day, says the Scripture, speaking of those worldly and carnal men who give the reins to their passion, "all their thoughts shall perish." Ps. xlv. That day of death which we now imagine to be full of obscurity, will enlighten their understandings and dissipate the clouds in which the truth had lain hidden from them. They will cease to believe what they had always believed, and will begin to see what they had never seen. What they once esteemed

they will hold in contempt, and what they passionately admired will put them to the blush. They will be seized with astonishment, fright, and consternation at so general a change in their mental faculties. The chimerical notions which they had had of the world and of its supposed happiness will vanish from their eyes, and come to nothing. All their thoughts shall perish. And whereas their passions had no foundation except in their thoughts, and whereas their thoughts, according to the expression of the prophet, shall perish in the same manner their passions shall perish. That is, they will lose their ardour for promotion, and their thirst of riches, because in that day they will see the inanity, and, if I may so speak, the extravagance of all that. Now, what is the case, when our life is taken up with the thoughts of death? We anticipate this last, this fatal moment; and, without waiting till the catastrophe and final unravelling of worldly intrigues disclose, in spite of us, this ill-understood vanity, we disclose it ourselves by holy cogitations. For, when I contemplate, in the presence of God, the image of death, I forthwith behold all the things of this life in the same point of view in which death will represent them; I pass now the same judgment which I then shall pass on them; I now acknowledge, as I then shall, how despicable they are; I now reproach myself, as I then shall, with my attachment to them; I now deplore, as I then shall, my intellectual blindness. My passion then subsides, the tumult abates, a tranquillity ensues, everything perishable and transient palls. In a word, I now die in thought and affection, because I foresee I must soon unavoidably die in reality.

This, beloved hearers, was the admirable secret which David found out, and by which he kept his passions in subjection. And that he might preserve in the midst of the court, where worldliness centres, this perfect disengagement from all that is worldly, what was his practice—what was this holy king's manner of proceeding? He was content to beg of God, as an extraordinary favour, that he would "make him know his end;" (Ps. xxxviii.;) and that he would even make him sensible how near it was, to the intent he might know (but by an efficacious and practical knowledge) "the number of his days, and what was wanting to him." Ps. xxxviii. He made no doubt that this thought alone—we must die—would be sufficient to extinguish the violence and fire of his passions the most ardent: and "behold, (adds he,) O Lord, thou hast made my days

as an hand breadth;" (Ps. xxxviii.;) and for that reason, whatever I am and whatever I desire or hope to be, "my whole substance is as nothing before thee." Ps. xxxviii. To my way of thinking, this nothing is something, nay, everything; but in your divine presence, what I denominate everything is blended with—is absorbed and lost in this nothing; and death, which every man living must regard as his inevitable destiny, makes of all the fortunes which they possess, of all the pleasures which they enjoy, of all the titles on which they plume themselves, as it were, an unfathomable abyss of vanity, because "every man living is altogether vanity." Ps. xxxviii. The worldly-minded man agrees not to this, and even affects to be ignorant of it; but it is true, notwithstanding, that his life is no more than a shadow and a figure, for that "every man passeth as a vain show." Ps. xxxviii. He is disturbed, and as a worldling, in continual agitation; but he is disturbed to no purpose, inasmuch as death will disconcert his measures, will counteract his schemes, will defeat his hopes: "He is disquieted in vain." Ps. xxxviii. He wearies himself out and exhausts his spirits in scraping together and hoarding up money; but his misfortune is, that he knows not so much as for whom he accumulates, or who will have the benefit of his toil and labour, whether his own children or relations, or no relations—whether prudent economists or extravagant squanderers: "He heapeth up treasures, and knoweth not who shall gather them." Ps. xxxviii. In so lively a manner was the royal prophet affected with these sentiments, that they repressed in him every—the most impetuous of his passions; and of a king upon the throne, made him a pattern of moderation.

This we experience in ourselves every day. For, let us own the truth, beloved hearers; were we not doomed to die, or had we the power of warding off this fatal necessity which makes us tributaries to death, how vain soever our passions might be, we should never be willing to acknowledge their vanity; we should never be willing to renounce the objects which are pleasing to them, and which they make us seek with so much eagerness. It were to little purpose to make us long exhortations upon that head, to recapitulate whatever the sages have said of it; to exert all the powers of reason and demonstration; we should construe all that into subtilities more vain than the very vanity which they meant to evince. Divine faith, with all her motives of credibility, would have no effect. Disengaged as we should be from the thoughts of death, which

keep us, like a severe and punctual master, within the bounds of duty, we should account it an innocent, nay, a wise maxim to give scope to our desires; the false glitter of worldly pomp would seem real and true; and our own reason, in opposition to us, would coincide and act in concert with passion.

But when we are told we are doomed to die, and in our own mind we revolve the same thought, ah! Christians, our self-love, however ingenious in its own cause, is disarmed and at a loss how to make a defence. Reason gets a powerful ascendant over it, obliging it to submit, without resistance, to the precepts of faith. The reason is that it can no longer disown its own weakness, which the view of death not only discovers to it, but makes it thoroughly sensible of. This distinction between the thoughts of death and other Christian thoughts is taken from St. Chrysostom. For why (he asks) do the thoughts of death make a deeper impression and show more evidently than other considerations the vanity of all created things? Mind his answer: because every other consideration includes at most but the testimonies and proofs of their vanity; whereas death is their essence, the very thing which constitutes their vanity. It is not, therefore, at all surprising that death should have the virtue and peculiar quality of disengaging us from all things. And such was the inference which St. Paul made with a view of inducing the primitive Christians to struggle for freedom and emancipation from the slavery of their passions, and to live in the practice of this holy and blessed disengagement, which he recommended to them with so much earnestness. For (says he) "the time is short;" and what should be the consequence? "That they who rejoice be as though they rejoiced not, and they who buy as though they possessed not, and they who use this world as though they used it not." (1 Cor. viii.) This, says St. Augustin, is an admirable inference; because in reality, to rejoice and have riches, and receive honours, and be obliged to die, is as if you received honours and received them not, as if you possessed riches and possessed them not, as if you rejoiced and rejoiced not. For this term "to die," is a term of privation; a term which destroys and annihilates every worldly thing; a term, the import of which is diametrically opposite to the essence of God, making things appear to us as though they were not, whereas Almighty God, according to the Scripture, denominates things which have no being as though they had existence.

2ndly. Our passions are vain, and, even so, are insatiable and without bounds. For, did ever the concurrence of a splendid fortune and worldly honours satisfy and give ease to the towering spirit of an ambitious man? Was ever the heart of an avaricious man contented with prosperity, accumulated acquisitions, and the overflowings of riches? What voluptuary, a slave to the senses, was ever willing to make an end of his pleasures? Nature (as Salvian ingeniously observes) is satisfied with necessaries; reason bends her view to the profitable and the decorous; self-love goes in quest of the agreeable and the delightful; but passion is impetuous for superfluities and excess. Now this superfluity and excess are infinite; yet notwithstanding their infinitude may be contracted, if we please, within narrow limits by the remembrance of death, as it will, in spite of us, by death itself. For at present I need only make use of the words adopted by the church: "Remember, man, thou art but dust, and unto dust thou shalt return." I need only address this decree to every one in this audience who is swayed by passion, in order to divest him of those vast and unmeasureable desires which perpetually torment him, and which are never satisfied. I need only give him the same invitation which the Jewish people gave the Saviour of the world, when they willed him to approach the tomb of Lazarus: "Come and behold;" come covetous man, "come and behold." You inwardly burn with an insatiable desire of amassing treasures, a desire of which nothing can allay the ardour; and because it is insatiable, it makes you perpetrate a thousand iniquitous deeds—steeling your heart to the miseries of the poor, and throwing you into an utter forgetfulness of salvation. Consider well this dead body: "Come and behold." This was a man of fortune like you; and like you became rich in a few years. He had, like you, the folly to conceive a strong desire of leaving behind him an opulent family, and his children provided to the best advantage. But do you see him now? Do you see the nakedness, the poverty to which death has reduced him? Where are his revenues? Where are his riches? Where is his sumptuous and magnificent furniture? Hath he anything more than the dregs of mankind have? Six feet of earth, a shroud to wind him up in, but which will not keep him from rotting and becoming the food of worms. What is all the rest come to? This should be sufficient to contract your avarice into a smaller compass. Come, man of the world, "come and behold," you, who are infa-

tuated with false greatness. Ambition possesses your very soul, and inwardly devours you; and, because this ambition is excessive and unlimited, it extinguishes in your heart every sentiment of religion. It engages your thoughts, it enchants and intoxicates you. Consider this sepulchre. What do you see in it? This was, like you, a man of note and rank, perhaps more so than you; distinguished by his quality, like you; and in a fair way of gaining everything that his heart could wish. But, do you know him again? Do you see the condition to which death hath reduced him? Do you see how it hath limited his extensive projects? Do you see how it sports with his airy views? This ought to be a rule for regulating yours. Come, woman of the world, "come and behold;" you, who are so vain of your person, and so pleased with yourself. Your darling passion is the care of your beauty; and because this passion hath no measure, it subjects you to an unbecoming and vicious delicacy; it produces criminal desires of pleasing; it makes you an accomplice to a thousand scandals, and induces you to cooperate to a thousand sins. "Come and behold:" this was a young person, as well as you; was the idol of the men, as well as you; was as sprightly as you; was as much courted, and had as many and as obsequious admirers as you. But do you see her at present? Do you see those sightless eyes—that hideous face—that frightful countenance? This is enough to restrain that unmeasureable love of yourself: "Come and behold."

3rdly. In fine, our passions are unjust; whether as to the sentiments with which they inspire us to our own advantage, or as to those they give us to the disadvantage of others. But death (says the philosopher) reduces us all to our just level; and by its remembrance obliges us to condemn our own proceedings, and do justice to others. And, indeed, when we neglect to think of death, and regard only certain distinctions in life, we are puffed up, we are dazzled, we are full of ourselves—we become haughty and high-minded, disdainful and supercilious, testy and exceptious, envious and revengeful—assuming, violent, passionate. We speak with ostentation, contempt, or acrimony; are easily offended; pardon with difficulty, provoke some, and bring others to ruin. Every one must yield to us; and we expect that all the world will behave to us with respect, though regardless ourselves of all the world, and negligent of good manners and decorum. Is it not this that, on some occasions, makes the power of the great so heavy and insup-

portable? But let us ruminate upon death, and speedily shall we learn to blame our own conduct, and make others amends for our haughtiness and pride; for our disdain and contempt; for our sensibility and touchiness; for our envy, our revenge, our moroseness, our violence, our transports of passion. As, therefore, (according to the decree and word of the Almighty ruler,) there needs no more than a grain of sand to stop the fury of the roaring billows: "Here shall thy proud waves be stayed;" there needs only the ashes which are sprinkled on our heads, and which call back to our minds the idea of death, in order to assuage the swellings of our heart, to bring down all its ferment, to preserve it in humility and sage moderation. The reason is, that death lays before us the perfect equality which God hath ordained between us and the rest of mankind; an equality we so willingly consign to oblivion, but the prospect of which is so necessary for us, in order to the rendering us more impartial and more tractable.

When we revolve in our minds what Solomon said, and when we say like him: "How wise and enlightened soever I may be, I must nevertheless die, like the greatest fool—as the death of the fool and mine shall be one." Eccles. ii. When we say of ourselves, like the royal prophet; you are deities upon earth, you are children of the Most High, but you are false deities, you are mortal men, you must really die like those whose adulation you are glad to receive, and from whom you require a kind of homage and adoration: "Ye are gods, and all of you children of the Most High, but ye shall die like men;" (Ps. lxxxi.;) when (according to the expression of the sacred penmen) we descend alive and in spirit into the grave, and the man of learning and knowledge mixes with the illiterate and the ignorant; the nobleman with the tradesman; the most renowned conqueror with the meanest slave; all covered with the same earth; all surrounded with the same darkness; all eaten by the same worms; all liable to the same corruption, the same rottenness—the same dust: "The small and great are there, and the servant free from his master." Job. iii. I say, when we make these reflections, and consider that those men above whom we place ourselves so very high in our own estimation; that those men who we so desire should feel the weight of our power, and over whom we would exercise an absolute sway; that those men, for whom we entertain neither compassion, nor charity, nor condescension, nor regard; that those men, at whose hands we bear not

with the smallest slight, and against whom we proceed with such rigour and animosity, are yet men like ourselves, of the same nature and species as ourselves; or, if you please, that we ourselves are men like them, as weak as they, as subject to death and to all its consequences as they: ah! beloved hearers, then it is that we fall into very different dispositions! We are no longer filled with an overweening notion of our own excellence, because we see ourselves in a clear perspective. We no longer exert our authority in so high and domineering a manner over those whom birth or fortune have placed in a station of life inferior to our own, because we perceive that there is not, after all, such a mighty difference between man and man. We no longer contend with so much vivacity for our supposed right, because we perceive that in many respects our pretentions and claims are not so well founded as we once imagined. We are no longer so grievously offended in particular cases and emergencies, nor so ardent and headstrong in demanding reparation and exorbitant satisfaction; because we set ourselves not so high in our own mind above the aggressor, whether real or imaginary; nor are persuaded that he must, in everything, yield to our humour, and bow the head to our will and pleasure. We become more gentle, circumspect, civil, complaisant, patient; and we learn to compassionate, to prevent, to excuse, to relieve, to do good, and to behave obligingly. These are the holy and salutary effects of the thoughts of death; the most sovereign remedy to extinguish the fire of our unruly passions, and the most infallible rule to direct our judgment in our deliberations, as I shall proceed to let you see in the second part.

Part II. How clear and penetrating soever may be our intellectual faculties, and whatever strength of rational powers we may pride ourselves in, it is an article of faith that "our thoughts are fearful, and our counsels uncertain." Wis. ix. Our thoughts (says St. Augustin, explaining this passage) are fearful; because not infrequently, even as to those things which regard salvation, we know not that we take the best resolution; nay, know that our resolution is absolutely good, and that we are possessed of sufficient evidence to discern it exactly, much less to discern it with certainty and infallibility. Whence it follows, that notwithstanding all our sagacity we are afraid of being deceived, and have reason to be afraid of it, as the step we take, how safe soever it may appear to be, may be otherwise in reality; and the contracted and

limited powers of weak reason keep us not from being exposed to deplorable accidents, against which the apostle meant to preserve us when he emphatically admonished us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling: "The cogitations of mortal men are fearful." As our thoughts are fearful—the sacred text adds—that our counsels are uncertain; because the depths of futurity being out of our reach, and God reserving the knowledge of it to himself, whatever preventive measures we may take, we are ever in uncertainty whether or not what we undertake, though with a pure and seemingly Christian intention, be rightly undertaken; whether we shall not one day or other have reason to repent of it; whether our conscience will never reproach us with it; and whether that which we thought innocent in the course of life, will not be the cause of bitter reflections and despair at our death: "And our providences are uncertain."

An unfortunate situation! A situation which the wisest of men deplored, and which he looked upon as the fatal consequence of sin. It is therefore of importance that we find out the means by which we may be delivered from such uncertainty, and from the fears and terrors so opposite to the internal peace of our souls; by which we may be put, whenever our duty is the point in question, in a condition always to conclude with certainty; and by which in a thousand critical conjunctures, in which conscience and salvation are united together, we may be equally preserved from error and remorse. Now I hold that the most effectual means for this purpose are the thoughts of death; because the thoughts of death are a lively and feeling application to ourselves of our last end, which ought to be the ground-work and solid foundation of all our deliberations; and because it is certain, that by frequently practising this holy exercise of the remembrance of death, we obviate all those remorses and disquietudes which otherwise might be consequent to our resolutions. Engaged as we are, indispensably engaged to regulate our conduct after God's appointment, is there anything more instructive—anything more edifying than such a truth? Hearken to this argument:

1st. In order to deliberate and resolve wisely, we must, beloved hearers, have this last end perpetually in view, as it ought to be the rule to direct us in all things, and to which, by consequence, all things we propose to ourselves in this world should tend like so many lines to the centre. By our last end, I mean that

supremely desirable good, that one thing necessary, that eternal salvation, which we must never lose sight of, and on which our actions must have all an essential and immediate dependence. In Christian morals, this is laid down as an indubitable axiom, an invariable principle universally admitted. But by what means shall we always be able to keep so sublime an object in view, and so strict a watch over our own conduct, and with such assiduity, as to observe each action, and what is its tendency, I do not say with respect to the particular and immediate end, which induceth us to act, but to that which is common and more remote, and to which it imports us all to aspire? It is, beloved hearers, to meditate upon, and take a survey of death; death, which represents, whether we will or not, the eternity that ensues; which brings nearer to our eyes a lively and piercing ray of light, that illumines our minds, and thereby discovers to us whatever in our undertakings, or in our designs is good or bad, safe or dangerous, advantageous or hurtful.

And, indeed, being affected with this thought, "I must die," I begin to form a much sounder, and much more rational judgment of all things. Freed from a thousand delusions, dissipated by death and eternity, I see, on all occasions, much more clearly and much more speedily, whatever may retard me, or whatever may further me, in prosecuting the end for which I was created; and having once perceived it, I take the resolution, without hesitation, which is proper to be taken, as to that which is salutary or prejudicial for me in the way of God. Without hesitation, I say: This is pernicious, this is advantageous, this will bring me into danger, this will be my destruction; and because it is pernicious, I ought to reject it; and because it is advantageous, I ought to accept of it; and because it is dangerous, I ought to apprehend it; and because it is destructive, I ought to avoid it. Without a veiw of death, the bare consideration of my last end would make on me, at most, but a slight impression; nor would it keep me from splitting upon a thousand rocks, nor hinder me from taking a thousand false steps. This is what we learn from daily experience. But when death, and eternity, which is inseparable from it, are the subject of my meditation, they affect my mind and all the powers of my soul: I am no longer perplexed with mental evagations; I am perfectly recollected, and my thoughts are fixed on that blessed end to which I am called, and for which I

was created. I am determined to have an eye to it in all my projects, concerns, and pursuits. And because this end, applied in this manner, is an infallible rule whereby I am taught to avoid evil and to do good, the contemplation of death becomes for me, according to the Scripture, a large fund of prudence and understanding: "O that they were wise, and understood, and would provide for their last end." Deut. xxxii.

Accordingly, why did the very pagans offer a kind of worship at the tombs of their ancestors? Why had they recourse to them as to so many oracles? Why did they hold at them their councils and meetings in their important treaties and negociations? It was, doubtless, a superstition; but this superstition, as Clemens of Alexandria rightly remarks, was nevertheless founded in a secret instinct of reason and religion. For they seem by it to acknowledge that their councils and designs could not be regularly and constantly carried on according to the dictates of true wisdom, without the remembrance and view of death, and of its fatal consequences. For this reason, they held not their meetings in places of public resort and rejoicings, but in solitude and the abodes of affliction and tears; because there it is, as Solomon observes, that we are authoratatively warned of the end of all men, and consequently more capable of consulting and deciding: "For in that the end of all men is signified." (Eccles. v.) Now what they did may serve us as a model, if rectified and sanctified by Christian faith.

In truth, beloved hearers, every day of your lives you ought, as I may say, to confer with God and with your own hearts, whether about chosing a state of life, or governing your families, or disposing of your property, or adjusting your affairs, or limiting your diversions, or regulating your devotions, or taking proper measures for your own conduct and that of others for whose souls you are responsible. For wo be to us, if, leaving all this to chance, we act inattentively without rule or principle. In vain should we alledge, that we have not sufficient penetration to discover, amidst all the embarrassments of worldly concerns, the fixed and immoveable point of true wisdom. It is a great mistake, beloved Christians, as we want not efficacious means for that purpose. Give me leave to prove it beyond a doubt or reply.

You are about to make a choice of a state of life: make choice of it as knowing you must one day or other submit to death, and you will see if the temptation and desire of aggrandizement will

induce you to attempt too high a flight. To regulate your disbursements is the point in hand: regulate them as knowing you must shortly lose every kind of possession, because you must shortly submit to death; and you will see if an exorbitant love of riches will confine your heart within the narrow bounds of a sordid avarice. A proposal is made to you respecting your interest, or gain, or profit: examine it as knowing you must give a strict account to God, and die—and you will see if the maxims and customs of the world will make you run any hazard of acting in contravention to the laws of conscience. You are deeply engaged in an intricate affair, you have a quarrel to make up: put an end to them both as you would chuse to have done, were you now reduced to the brink of eternity—and you will see if obstinacy, pride, or presumption, will tempt you to overlook the laws of equity or induce you to forego the duties of charity. No, Christians, you will have nothing to fear. This thought alone, that die you must, will rectify your mistakes, will dissipate your prejudices, will restrain your impetuosity, will check your vivacity, and will serve as a counterpoise to your levity and inconstancy.

And was it not this that, in every age, directed the saints, without deviating or falling, in the path of virtue? Was it not this that made them so frequently take generous resolutions, which the world condemned as the height of folly, but which were inspired by the sublime wisdom and spirit of the Gospel. Was it not this that induced them to embrace humiliating labours and painful vocations, against the bent of nature, which nothing but the efficacy of grace could support? The road, which, for fear of being lost for ever, they were determined to follow, was one of the secret ways of predestination, but which, in other respects so undiscernible, preceptibly came in view as they contemplated death. Dangers they met with and snares in their way: for who can help meeting with them? But the prospect of death preserved them against dangers and snares of all kinds; and it depends upon you and me to draw from them the same advantage.

If, therefore, we want sufficient discernment to conduct ourselves properly; if, for want of knowledge, we fall into great and irreparable faults; if we rashly bind ourselves in important cases; if we enter upon a state to which God hath not called us, and in which he deprives us of a thousand graces, which he would in other circumstances, have imparted to us; if we accept of employments

for which we are unfit, and in which we commit innumerable sins, through want of capacity; if we contract alliances productive of vexations, rancorous aversions, family feuds, and scandalous divorces; if we run into projects, which bring on us misfortunes, and of which the issue turns to our shame and ruin; if we engage in partnerships, in business or in trade, in which conscience is concerned, and in which salvation is in some shape impossible (for you know how common all these things are; and God only knows what numbers of souls will be eternally miserable for having acted in this manner without thought or discretion), if, I say, all this should come to pass, let us not, dear Christians, impute it to God; neither let us impute it to our infirmity. God hath taken care to provide against it; and notwithstanding our infirmity, the remembrance of death might and ought to have screened us, and made us stand secure. But let us lay the blame on our own unfaithfulness, which banishes from our minds, and dispels, as a troublesome and disagreeable object, this necessary remembrance of our final departure, as by an inevitable consequence it leads us into all those errors and that ill conduct into which we unthinkingly let ourselves be drawn.

2ndly. From hence arises another advantage, which is in some measure a consequence of the former. For, to deliberate wisely, we should prevent the disquietudes, and, with still greater reason, the repentance and despair which might otherwise be the result of our deliberations; because (says St. Bernard) whatever is the source or cause of repentance, could not have been suggested by a wise man. Now whence can flow so advantageous an affect? What can enable us to say if we will, every moment of our life: what I am going to do, I shall never repent of—what I am going to do, I shall to all eternity be glad to have done? Nothing Christians, but the frequent use of what I call the practical knowledge of death. The reason of it is excellent, and given by St. Augustin: death being the term, says this holy doctor, to which all the designs of mankind tend, in death their repentance and anguish commence. But to prevent this, we must antedate as much as in us lies the moment of death by putting the question to our own breast: what will be at the moment of death my sentiments relatively to my present undertaking? Will it disturb or comfort me? Will it give me confidence, or rack me with sorrow? Shall I approve or disapprove of it? For to each of

these questions there is within ourselves a decisive answer, however general, upon which we may depend; and that answer, to apply in this place the apostle's words, is the answer of death: "And we in ourselves have the answer of death." 2 Cor. ii.

As long as we reason upon principles regarding life only, the answers we give ourselves keep us in a constant irregularity of conduct; and this makes us repent of what ought to comfort us, and induceth us to applaud what ought to afflict us. But the thoughts of death by a contrary virtue, redress if I may so speak all these sentiments. They make us joyful for that which ought to be, and which ever will be a true motive to joy. They make us sorrowful and repentant for that which ought to be—and which will be more at our death than it was in the course of our life—a true motive to repentance and sorrow. By attachment to life, we entertain but transient and variable repentances, which makes us one day approve of what we blamed another. And hence it is, that our very repentance cannot produce in us that uniformity of demeanour which is the chief characteristic of Christian prudence. But as often as we ruminate on death we foresee it, and thereby prevent eternal repentance, of which the invariable horror hath power sufficent to quell our inward tumults, and to hinder passion from blinding reason.

Now here it is, that the prudence of the righteous exults and triumphs over the rashness of the wicked. For, in short brother, would I say with St. Jerom to a libertine of the times: however hardened you may be in your sin—however unconcernedly you may seem to commit it; whatever fortitude of mind you may display in taking the resolution, this still is your misfortune, that you cannot reflect upon your past conduct without pronouncing against yourself this dreadful sentence: I am taking a step which will throw me into all the pangs of despair, at least at my death, and for which at that time I would atone by the sacrifice of a thousand lives.

I know you endeavour as much as possible to stifle this sentiment; but I also know that it is not at all times in your power to stifle it; I know that whether you will or not, this reflection intrudes itself upon you, and teizes and perplexes you, even when you exert your utmost endeavours to expel it from your mind. I know that it haunts you in the midst of your pleasures, in the midst of the diversions and joys of the world, at times taken up, to outward appearance, with unalloyed happiness—it seizes you, it

troubles you, and in the bottom of your soul makes you pay with costs for that false tranquillity which consists only in a deceitful outside. But I who would guard against these latent frights, these secret agitations—what do I do? I give free admittance to the remembrance of death, in order that a stinging and importunate remorse may not stir it up in me against myself. By the thoughts of death, I prevent the repentance which I should feel when it came; and, instead of postponing them to that last hour, I turn them to account at the present moment: I am now desirous of being affected with them, that they may not bring me to despair at my death—that is to say, that I may never repent—I am now desirous of being impressed with an idea of future repentance. I say with the prophet, "That the sorrows of death have encompassed me around (Ps. xvii); its grief, its regret, its despair have invested and closely besieged me on every side; and, far from putting myself on the defensive, I regard them as my greatest happiness and security. And, indeed, what can there be more desirable for me than to have within myself that which answers for me to myself—that which serves to regulate all my proceedings, direct all my steps, and how to discover their pernicious consequences, and how to avoid them? With this, what can I fear? Nay, with this, what may I not undertake? Thus the thoughts of death are the most sovereign remedy for extinguishing the fire of our unruly passions, and the most infallible rule to conclude securely in our deliberations. That they are the most efficacious means to inspire us with a secret fervour in our actions shall be the subject of the third and last part.

Part III. It is upon the fervour of our actions that our progress in holiness of life depends; and it is holiness of life that must make our death precious in the sight of God. This, says Saint Chrysostom, is the natural order which the wisdom of God hath ordained for his elect, and from which we may say that his providential care cannot even excuse us. That which confounds, or rather say destroys this fine disposition, is a large fund of sloth and tepidity; tepidity, which God so highly condemns in the sacred page; tepidity which corrupts our best actions—I say those actions which religion and Christianity oblige us to perform—insomuch that, however good in themselves, our life, far from being sanctified by them, becomes often more imperfect, and even more criminal, and finally terminates in that kind of death which should make us

tremble, if we form our judgment from the views of God and the extreme rigour of his sovereign justice. This sloth, Christians, we must manfully encounter, which is capable of itself, without other irregularity, to effect our ruin: this we must conquer; and it is what our Saviour would particularly inculcate, and to which, if we ponder it, he seems to have directed the scope of his Gospel. For, what did that divine Redeemer of men come to do upon earth? He came to diffuse the fire of charity and the zeal of good works in the hearts of men: "I am come to send fire on the earth." Luke xii. Such was the ultimate view of his mission. Now of all the motives which he could propose to us, or did really propose to us, in order to excite this fervour in our breasts—this heavenly fire—the two most powerful, without dispute, are, the proximity of death, and the uncertainty of death. The proximity of death, of which he laboured to make us sensible, as the strongest incentive, and the most capable to impel us; the uncertainty of death, which he hath so often represented to us as an inducement to vigilance and continual attention. To these two motives this divine Master directly refers his adorable instructions; motives, in which we shall find wherewithal to awaken our ardour and animate our zeal to do the good works which his heavenly grace inspires us to do.

1st. Yes, Christians, we must labour with diligence and that fervour of spirit which ought to be the soul of all our actions, because we draw near to our final dissolution; and it is the first motive which confounds our sloth. Walk, says the Saviour of mankind, while the sun shines, because the night will come when no one shall have it in his power to act. Be upon the watch, because the Son of Man, whom you expect not, is already at the gate. Traffic and profit by the talent you are possessed of, because the Master who entrusted you with it is on the point of returning, and calling you to a severe account for it. Keep your lamps lighted, because the bridegroom is already arrived. Make what haste you can to produce fruits, because the time is at hand for getting in the harvest. What would he give us to understand by all this? Ah! Christians, these, though quite mysterious parables, sufficiently explain themselves, and clearly discover to us, in spite of our folly when, placing death at an imaginary distance, though, according to the Scripture there is but a point between us, we believe, or fancy we have a right to relax in the practice of our duty. Such

is our blindness; and of this error Jesus Christ would disabuse us. This walking, is neither more nor less than laying on us his commands to advance and make progress in the way of salvation; this watching, than attention to ourselves; this trafficing, than the good use of time; these lighted lamps, than the edification of a pious and exemplary life, "Let your light shine before men" (Matt. v.); these fruits, than the works of penance and sanctification, "Bring forth fruits worthy of penance;" (Luke iii.) and this day of gathering in the harvest, this return of the master, this arrival of the bridegroom, this night which draws near, were no more than symbols in the ordinary language of the Son of God, but natural symbols of an approaching death. As if Christ had declared to us that his infinite wisdom could furnish us with nothing more proper to inflame us with a holy zeal, and to withdraw us from a lukewarm and languid life than the nearness of death.

And, indeed, Christians, although we should live for ages together, and God, exerting either his severity or his goodness, should suffer us to equal in length of years the patriarchs of old—those founders of the world, we should still have a thousand reasons to reproach ourselves with sloth and remissness. At what distance sowever death may be from us, as all our actions have a reference to eternity, as they necessarily must stand the test of God's unerring judgment, as they are capable to merit for us eternal glory—it is but just that the manner in which we die, as God should always be served in the manner worthy of him, and of the reward which we expect from his bountiful hand; and wo be to us, if even then we misuse so precious a time, and negligently perform, as the Scripture speaks, the work of the Lord. But to be at the eve of appearing before the judgment-seat of God, and persist contentedly in a negligent life; to be near the time when we shall be ever after unable to act, and not redouble our care and vigilance by a more active life, to have death full in view, and, like the Apostle, to "die daily," and not endeavour with all carnestness to arrive at holiness, by the compendious method of a devout life, can be attributed only, beloved hearers, either to gross stupidity or to infidelity, if not consummated, at least in its commencement. Yet such is our situation—a deplorable situation! Ah! Christians, Christ Jesus tells us in express terms, "Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me," (Apoc. xxii.) that each may be rewarded according to his works. Weigh well these words. He

says not, I will come, or, I am getting ready to come; but he says, "I come," nay "I come quickly." Make haste, therefore, concludes the Lord, addressing himself to the lazy, torpid soul, and load yourselves with spoils; make a rich booty of so many virtuous deeds which you omit, which you neglect and of which you lose the merit: "Hasten to take spoils, make haste to take booty" (Isai. viii.) God, I say, both in the Old and New Testament, by his own words, by the mouths of his prophets, by the dictates of his priests, speaks to us, warns us, and presses us in this manner. Fruitless, however, are all his admonitions with us: the time glides on, and we remain in the same insensibility, in the same languid state, because we never ponder with sufficient attention the shortness of life.

For, in short, brethren, if you and I were fully convinced that our time was restrained to a few days; if we should often say with the great St. Paul, and in a manner to be deeply affected with this thought, "the time of my dissolution is at hand" (2 Tim. iv.); I am like a victim that hath received the aspersion in order to be immolated; the time approaches, and it should seem that I was already in the bosom of death: if, by the ministry of an angel, the Almighty declared to us that this was foredoomed to come to pass to-morrow, what should we do? Or, rather, what should we not do? This sole idea which I propose for your reflection, and which after all is only a supposition, carries with it although a mere supposition, I know not what, that affects, that strikes, that rouses, that impels to action. We should do all in our power, and still lament that we had done too little. Far from relenting, we should run into an excess that would need be moderated. Neither diversions nor pleasures, neither public meetings nor private company, neither hope nor interest, neither passion nor connexion; nothing could interrupt or take off our attention. Recollected, and as it were absorbed in ourselves, or, to speak more properly, recollected and as it were absorbed in God, dead to the world and to all things in it, to all its vanities, to all its amusements, our thoughts, our desires would every moment be devoted to him, and every action of our life would be sanctified by the merit of fervent charity. And as the velocity of a body proportionally increases as it returns to its centre; so should we perceive, that our zeal and activity increased every moment as we drew nearer to our last end. This is the miracle, the visible miracle, which the presence of death

would operate in us. And why should it not operate the same in us now? Hath not Christ spoken with sufficient precision? or is the word of an angel more powerful and effectual than the word of God?

Would you wish to know, beloved hearers, what the words and works are of one who beholds approaching death and makes it the subject of his contemplations? Give ear to the holy king Hezekias, and learn to amend by his example: "I shall go (says he) to the gates of hell... I shall behold man no more... my life is cut off." Isai. xxxviii. Now these principles being thus settled—for they were, in reality, so many principles which he laid down—what were the deductions which he made from thence, and the practical inferences for the reformation of life? They are truly admirable, nor can I lay before you a finer model: "I will cry (says he) like a young swallow, I will meditate like a dove; my eyes are weakened with looking upwards... I will recount to thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul... The living shall confess to thee, as I do this day." Isai. xxxviii. Thus this religious monarch spoke: and hence, Christians, we learn that method, so solid, so thoroughly known to the saints, so little practised among us, and yet so practicable, and on which depends the sanctification of our lives, namely, to perform all our actions as if each were to be the last and to be followed by death; to pray as we should pray at our death; to examine our conscience as we should examine it at our death; to bewail our offences as we should bewail them at our death, to receive the blessed sacrament as we should receive it at our death. Thus shall we reform all our lukewarmness and all our remissness, and give spirit and life to all our works by calling to our remembrance, that death draws near.

2ndly. If objection be made, that it is uncertain, whether death be near us or at a distance: I grant it, beloved hearer; but what gather you from thence? Because it is uncertain when and what day you shall die, ought your vigilence, therefore, and your fervour to relax in the observance of your duty? And is not this uncertainty, which perhaps you allege in the vindication of your negligence, a fresh and cogent reason to condemn you? For, why doth our Saviour command us to watch? Not only because death is not far off, but because it is uncertain; that is, "Because we know not the day nor the hour." Matt. xxviii.

And truly if we knew exactly the hour and the day we should

die, the penitence of life, and the exercise of piety would be at an end. Everything would be put off to the last year; and in the last year, to the last month; and in the last month, to the last week; and in the last week, to the last day; and in the last day, to the last hour—or even to the last moment. Therefore no salvation—because the moment of death is neither the time for penance nor for good works; and because without penance and good works, salvation is impossible. But Almighty God, equally wise and merciful, keeps us with regard to this last moment in absolute uncertainty, that at every moment we may be upon our guard. For, what thought is so capable of perpetually renewing us in spirit as this: perhaps the present day may be the last of my days; perhaps after this confession, or communion, or sermon, or conversation, or businesss, death will come, and on a sudden will snatch me out of this world, and waft me to the bar of an all-powerful judge? When once we are habituated to this idea, and the traces of it are strongly impressed on our memory, far from relenting, or falling into dejection, we recoil at nothing, we are dismayed at nothing; we proceed with spirit, and surmount obstacles seemingly insurmountable. We are now (and it is a fine sketch of a fervent life, which the apostle himself hath delineated for us) we are laborious and assiduous, stirring and zealous, indefatigable in God's service, disengaged from the world, attentive only to the things of heaven; patient in suffering, addicted to prayer, charitable to our brethren, always delighted with the works of mercy; in a word, we are faithful in the execution of that which we owe to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves: "In carefulness not slothful, in spirit fervent, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, instant in prayer, communicating in the necessities of the saints, pursuing hospitality, providing good things not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of all men." Rom. xii.

But let us proceed to something more urgent, and more suitable to that which the Deity requires of us, in this holy time especially on which we are entered. It is a time of penitence; and the most important and necessary action of our life is, to return into the favour of our God by a sincere and perfect conversion. Now is it not in this that we chiefly experience our own weakness, and discern our inactivity and want of resolution? The uncertainty of death must make us break our connexions by a generous effort

and infuse into our minds that fervour of conversion which enraptures the soul, which disunites her from the world, and which lifts her up to heaven without delay. For, tell me, sinner, can anything move you, if you are not moved by the emminent danger to which it exposes you? If you die in your sin, you are lost—and lost without resource. And may you not die while you remain in it? And may you not die at every moment, as nothing is more uncertain than the moment of death?

But I am mistaken, Christians: there is one certain thing in death, that it will take us unawares. The Saviour of the world was not content to say: "Watch, because ye know not the day nor the hour when the Son of Man will come." He stops not there, but expressly adds: "Watch, because the Son of Man will come at the hour you do not expect him." Can words be expressed with more clearness and precision? And doth not the infallibility of him who spoke them, enhance the crime of living in sin and neglecting a speedy return to God? Had this divine Master mentioned only the uncertainty of the time when I must die, it had been some extenuation, perhaps, of my guilt, I should say: as it is uncertain, I have some right to hope. To run the hazard of it I own is rash, but my rashness destroys not absolutely my confidence. I may be surprised, and I may not; and for this extravagant manner of proceeding, such as it is, I have some pretext. But after the word which Christ hath spoken, I am not allowed to reason in that manner—and I ought to reckon that I shall die at the hour I think not of it. These are the means, the only means, by which the Son of God instructs me concerning this fatal hour. All that I know in a manner to preclude all doubt is, that the day of my death will be a deceitful day for me: "At what hour ye think not" (Luke xii.) Do not I therefore conspire my own ruin, if in this situation, and seeing myself exposed to all the hatred and vengeance of my God, I take not just and speedy measures to return into his favour, and to prevent by penance the stroke with which he had so loudly and so frequently threatened me? Have you ever, Christians, made on this head, I do not say all the necessary reflections, but any reflections? Even now while I am speaking to you on the topic of death, do you think of death? Do you think of it justly? Do you think of it attentively? Do you think of it like Christians? Do you think of it efficaciously? But if you do not think of it—of what do you think? And if at

present you think not of it, when will you think of it? Or who will ever think of it in your stead? Happy those who defer not to think of it till it be too late! Happy those who think of it during the course of life! Thus shall death, the punishment of sin, be in our regard a remedy against sin. By sin it first made its way into the world: but if we contemplate it like the saints, it will, by grace, introduce us like them into a blissful eternity.

SERMON XXVI.

ON PREPARATION FOR DEATH.

For the fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost.

When he came near unto the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother: and she was a widow, and many people of the city were with her. And when the Lord saw her, being moved with compassion he said unto her: Weep not. Luke vii.

This passage, beloved Christians, exhibits in one view many motives to compassion: a mother bereft of her only son; a woman, deprived of her most pleasing hope; a young man cut off in the bloom of his years; a sole heir of his family divested all at once of his whole pretensions; in fine, a great multitude of people that follow the corpse to the grave, and that take part in the doleful ceremony. Here was undoubtedly, says St. Gregory of Nice, wherewithal to affect the Saviour of men: and it is hardly credible, that the God of mercy should not be moved at a sight so lugubrious and deserving of pity. But, after all, he was touched more feelingly, in the opinion of St. Chrysostom, with another object. The loss of a son, the wailing of a mother, the death of an heir, the affliction of a widow, were but human considerations, too insignificant to make a deep impression on the heart of a God: but that which he could not behold without grief, was the excessive and quite natural attachment of this mother to the person of her son; the infidelity of this woman, who contemplated death with the eyes of flesh, and not of faith; the misfortune of this young man, surprised by an unforeseen accident, and seized on by death without preparation.

Now to dwell upon this last article only, which seems the most essential and the most important, is it not in this manner that numberless Christians die every day, I mean without thinking of or preparing for death? And what is more deplorable than the condition of a man who perceives himself going the way of all flesh, and that, too, at a time when he is least prepared for it, having taken no measures to provide for a change, of which the consequences are great and eternal? Wherefore, Christians, it is of the utmost importance to lay before you such documents as may enable you to prevent so dreadful a disaster, and therefore it is that I have chosen for the subject of your present entertainment, preparation for death.

St. Chrysostom, giving proper rules of life, and by them desirous to dispose a Christian soul for death, makes this preparation to consist particularly in three things, to wit, persuasion of death, watchfulness against death, and the practical knowledge of death; three dispositions necessarily connected with one another, which shall make the division of this discourse. The first rule, says this holy doctor, to prepare for death is to be thoroughly persuaded of it; the second, to be always upon the watch against its surprises; the third and last, to make life itself, as it were, a continual apprenticeship to it. Now, in regard to us, what is it that moves our Saviour to compassion? It is this, beloved hearers, that although we fear death to so great a degree, we live, notwithstanding, supinely neglectful and profoundly forgetful of its approaches. First, we are afraid to die; and yet, how certain and near soever death may be, scarce are we persuaded that we must die. Secondly, we are afraid to die; and yet how certain and deceitful soever death may be, we take as little precaution as if we were informed of the time and state in which we shall die. Thirdly, we are afraid to die; and yet in spite of the daily, the plain and obvious experience which we have of death, by our way of life we never effectually learn to die.

These three heads require severally to be elucidated, and for that reason I entreat you to favour me with all your attention.

Part I. The great, the holy, the divine exercise of preparation for death, must arise from persuasion. For, as St. Chrysostom observes, it is hard that I should seriously prepare for a thing of which I am not as yet thoroughly persuaded; neither is it possible, if I am thoroughly persuaded, when the consequences

of it must be as irreparable and terrible as are those of death, that I should not use my utmost endeavours to prepare for it. Therefore, beloved hearers, look not upon what I am now going to advance as a paradoxical proposition, or at least an instruction of no utility. Nor tell me that death is so very certain that there is nothing of which we are more fully convinced; for I hold it, on the contrary, that there hardly is anything of which mankind are less convinced. The assertion will surprise you, and would surprise me, too, if I knew not in what sense it should be understood; an assertion invariably fixed on the solid basis of truth, which I purpose to make appear in the following exposition.

True it is, Christians, we are all persuaded that an irreversible sentence of death is passed in the supreme court of God's justice against sinful man: "It is decreed unto all men once to die." Heb. ix. But, by a strange infatuation of our self love, we forget that this sentence must be executed in our persons, and we live in reality, as though we were persuaded that we should never die. We well know, in general, that all men shall die; but, deluded by a thousand chimerical hopes, we find means of excepting ourselves in particular. To speak more properly, we have a theoretic evidence, and are fully convinced that we ourselves shall die; but a thousand practical errors, at the same time, induce us to believe that we shall not. That is to say, we easily allow that we are doomed to die one day or other, and that it is a rigorous law with which we are necessitated to comply; but we comfort ourselves in the groundless thought that it will not be soon, that as yet we have time, that the fatal hour is not yet come, that we shall not die of this disorder; and this persuasion hinders us from entering upon the disposition requisite to prepare for death. For let it be remembered, beloved Christians, that to know in speculation that we are destined to die, is not what disposes us to a good death; but to be actually affected and penetrated with this internal sentiment—I shall die, and my hour of dissolution approaches. I shall die, and it will be in one of those years which I promise myself in vain. I shall die, and it will be in the manner and at the time I least foresee. This is what determines us to take generous resolutions of reforming our lives, and to think efficaciously and solidly of death.

What then doth the enemy of our salvation do? Observe, beloved hearers, the artifice he uses to keep us in impenitence.

He leaves us the possession of all those thoughts respecting death, which he knows we shall turn to no advantage, and robs us of the only one capable to convert us. He offers not to persuade us that we shall never die; this would be too gross, too palpable an error, and indeed unnecessary in order to work our destruction and wo; but he makes us believe that we shall not die either to-day or to-morrow, or during that whole time, when the charity which each one owes himself should press us to return to God; and that is all he wants. For, by these crafty means, never thinking on death, we never draw from it those salutary consequences on which depends our conversion to God. And it is in this sense, that St. Chrysostom, explaining these words, "Ye shall surely die" (Gen. iii.) understands it. The remark of this father is worthy of your attention. He says then that the devil, that lying spirit, still employs to seduce us, the same wiles which he employed in paradise against our first parents; and that when he attempts to make us fall into sin, or withhold us from penance, one of the most ordinary means he makes use of to secure success is, to suggest to us, as he did to the first man and woman—that "we shall not surely die." But how can he blind us to that excess? Though God should not tell us, nor reason convince us, would not experience alone be sufficient, nay, more than sufficient, to extort a belief that die we must? What likelihood that we should ever be able to contradict not only our faith and reason, but the incontestable and evident testimony of our senses? To judge by this test, it were perhaps less astonishing, that the father of men should be surprised in that snare: for as yet he had seen no example of death, and the state of innocence in which God had created him endued him with unalterable health of body, and even rendered him immortal. Accordingly, so long as he was observant of good order, feeling no weakness that admonished him of mortality, he might with much more ease be duped by the empty promises of the tempter, and vainly flatter himself that "he should not surely die." But, beloved Christians, to tell us, whose eyes are continually struck with the image of death; whom death (as I may say) surrounds on all sides; who behold it in others, and have melancholy proofs of it from the infirmities we feel in our own persons: to tell us, "ye shall not surely die," would be, it should seem, the last temptation by which our ghostly enemy would attack us, much less deceive us. It is that, however, by which he attacks us the most frequently, and

what is still more strange, it is that by which he mostly succeeds. It is a clumsy artifice, I own; but our blindness is so much the more to be lamented, when we cannot see through it. Now this is the case at every moment. For, the spiritual foe, who, on all occasions, is contriving our ruin, and who knows our weakness, need but take the advantage, and insinuate that "we shall not surely die," and we believe him. He need but give us to understand, that we are young, that the case is not urgent, that we shall be able to think of ourselves in good season, and without farther examination we put confidence in him; and in this strange confidence we live undisturbed, in the same dispositions, in the same inordination of a worldly life—in the same state of an irregular conscience. The reason is this: we are never persuaded, I mean efficaciously—that die we must.

Nay, it would seem as if a good understanding was kept up, in this, between us and our enemy. For, so far are we from being convinced of the uncertainty of death, that we would not be so, that we fear to be so, that we banish from our minds whatever considerations might make us be so; and these considerations, which ought to sanctify us, for the most part disturb us, afflict us, dispirit us, sometimes even exasperate us, when the least insinuations, at the approach of death, are thrown out respecting our desperate situation. Hence it arises, according to a wise remark of St. Chrysostom, that most men die without thinking they shall die, and almost always with a presumptuous assurance that they shall not die. Hence it arises, that those very people who constantly and visibly have the shortest time to live, are those, notwithstanding, who toil and strive the most for a livelihood. How many do you see tottering under the pressure of a mortal illness, and already given over by the voice of the public, yet who form new projects, undertake fresh business, and make themselves uneasy about a thousand affairs, as if they were of all men the most interested in providing for the time to come? How many old men, sinking under the dead-doing weight of years, and with one foot in the grave, are as covetous of earthly possessions and advantages as if a life of whole ages had been ensured to them? Hence it arises, that the great ones of the world by a fatality, as I may say, annexed to their condition, are never made to know to what pass they are come, even when they are come almost to death's door; the notion being general, that they would not willingly be made to know it. Hence

it arises, that every one conspires to deceive them in conjunctures in which it so much imports them to have their eyes opened. They are bid to be assured that all goes well, when it is very evident that all goes ill; they receive congratulations upon a slight success, and a tolerable favourable alteration to appearance, but which is nothing, at bottom, but the last effort of exhausted nature; they are imposed upon with regard to symptoms and presages of approaching death, which are dexterously and carefully concealed from them; they are told of the force and virtue of remedies in a strain of exaggeration, but not one word do they hear of the sovereign remedy—penance. In this manner they are fed with destructive hopes, but from what motives? From motives merely human; by a wife, through excessive fondness; by children, through respect, or interested views; by strangers, through complaisance; by servants, through fear. Thus the truth is always kept from them: and accordingly, though grasped in the claws of death and on the point of expiring, they hold it for certain that they shall not die. Hence it arises that those whom the duty of their office obliges to prevent this mischief, and speak without reserve, have so great a difficulty to disclose their minds; that they leave it to each other, the priest to the doctor and the doctor to the priest; that they are each unwilling to deliver a message, disagreeable, indeed, yet of the utmost importance, with which God entrusted them—and sacrifice to weak and worldly considerations the salvation of a soul, of which the eternal destiny depended on their faithfulness. Hence it arises, that if the case must at last be declared, and the patient be pressed in such great extremity to recur to the sacraments, so many precautions, so many circumlocutions are generally used. He is assured that as yet there is no reason to despair, and that although they exhort him to this act of religion, they mean not that the danger is so imminent as to admit of no delay, but that it is advisable for him to take proper measures in good time, and to set his mind at rest. That is, they deprive him of one of the most powerful inducements to penance, and perhaps the only one capable at that time to move his heart—the prospect of God's approaching judgment.

Very different from this was the conduct of the prophet, when in the name of the Lord, and with a holy freedom, he warned the King of Juda that his dissolution was at hand, and that he must depart in order to give an account of his conduct to the supreme

Judge: "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live." Isai. xxxviii. This decree he pronounced peremptorily, and without extenuation: Thou shalt die. He had no regard either to royal grandeur or to the trouble which the thoughts of death would create. You shall die, O King, you in person—monarch as you are—an absolute monarch. Alas! Christians, where are there now-a-days prophets to be found, I do not say for princes and crowned heads, but for persons in subordinate stations in life, especially those who are distinguished by their birth or their rank in the world? I am not astonished that men die by unforeseen and unusual accidents, without being persuaded that they are going to die. Such is the dreadful chastisement of God, when, to punish the sinner, he permits death to surprise him in his sin. But this comes not within the verge of my subject. What I deplore, and what I condemn at present is, that dying persons, whom Almighty God summons the most common ways; persons whom death, to the last gasp, indulges with the freest use of reason; persons in whose behalf the divine justice abates of its rights by conforming to their need, and allowing them to enter into themselves; that such persons should die, notwithstanding, without being convinced of the actual necessity and vicinity of death, and that this want of conviction should not arise from a rigorous vengeance of chastising heaven, or an unexpected accident that defeats their measures, but from an insurmountable, perverse, infatuating wilfulness; that they should make it their business, themselves, as I may say, to deceive and mislead themselves, imagining things to be not as they are, but as they would have them to be, to me seems deserving not of compassion but of indignation.

Now which is the remedy, beloved Christians? I shall give it you as I find it in the doctrine and maxims of St. Gregory, pope, than whom none of the fathers seem to have sounded and discussed this subject with greater clearness, accuracy, and precision.

The first maxim—To entertain habitually, within ourselves, a general conviction, that die we must, would rectify our mistaken notions; that is, continually to counteract, with a lively idea of it, our presumptuous security respecting death, and often call to mind that we are destined to die, and at an hour, too, when we shall not apprehend that our hour is come. This even the oracle of truth hath declared to me; and wo be to me, if, in spite of the

express terms of the Gospel, in spite of the formidable menace of Jesus Christ, I still hesitate to give my assent to it. A salutary remembrance this of death, which Moses recommended in such strong terms to the children of Israel, not doubting that so inconstant and refractory a people, so long as they should have this object before them, would pay submission to the rulers whom God hath appointed over them. "O that they were wise, and understood, and would consider their latter end." Deut. xxxiii.

The second maxim—To have a sincere, upright, open-hearted friend, who, not over-delieate, or fearful of offending, nor used to listen to the suggestions of a weak or interested friendship, would come to us with an artless, significant countenance, would acquaint us with our danger without hesitation or circumlocution, and would bespeak us with the zeal and energy of the prophet: "Set thy conscience in order, for thou shalt die, and not live." To require of him, as the greatest favour he could do us, that he would speak his mind without delay, and that by so doing he need not apprehend he shall give us uneasiness. To make him thoroughly sensible that thereby we shall judge whether he be perfectly devoted to us; that thereby we shall discriminate him from false friends; that thereby we shall be indebted to him for the most precious of graces, the persuasion that we shall die, when on the point of dying. This is the friendly office we should wish for. Every other kindness is trifling, is despicable, is oftentimes dangerous. But to turn one's thoughts to a dying man's salvation, to take care of his soul and his eternal doom, to dispose him, by sage and timely advice, to finish like a Christian a life which must terminate in supreme happiness or supreme misery, is, properly speaking, to be a friend till death. But where shall we find this faithful friend? Not among worldlings. If these be friends (and how few of them are so?) it is according to the deceitful spirit of the world, it is in regard to the frivolous advantages of the world, it is to settle, to promote a friend in the world. We shall find him in the number of virtuous men, the small number of zealous servants, whom Almighty God favours with his special protection, and whose piety is known to us. We shall find him among the ministers of Christ our Lord—friends the more solid, as, after helping us to live well, they will lend us their assistance to die well.

The third maxim—To keep up our courage against the fear of death, because it is the immoderate fear of death that renders the

thoughts of it so very odious, and the persuasion of it so very difficult. That which we fear, we gladly conceive to be at a great distance, and endeavour to lose all remembrance of it, as a thing not likely to come to pass. Now which is the way to overthrow this fear? By the arms of faith, by the motives of hope, by the holy ardour of divine love. With that view, to say to ourselves in silent meditation: "The bridegroom cometh" (Matt. xxv.), let us go, my soul, let us go and meet him. Behold he advances, he will not come, no, he actually comes, yet not to destroy you, but to snatch you from the miseries of this mortal life, and put you in possession of his heavenly kingdom. He comes, not to cast you away from his presence, but to clasp you in his bosom, and unite you to himself for evermore. True it is, that this kind of language is too sublime for sensual souls, but conveys the genuine and usual feelings of godly persons. With these dispositions they cheerfully contemplate approaching death; and the more attentively they consider its approaches the better prepared they are to receive it, by redoubling their care, their assiduity, their fervour: "The bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him." For, to what doth this persuasion incline us? To be watchful against death, which I shall make the subject of the second part.

Part II. Could any one imagine, beloved Christians, that it was possible to find out a preservative against death; to bring it over to our interest, notwithstanding its uncertainty; to make it, in some measure, assume another nature; and whereas it is deceitful, to make it faithful to us, or, at least, to put it out of its power to betray us? The Saviour of the world, however, took care to reveal this important secret to us; and St. Chrysostom tells us that it is included in this admonition—"watch;" a word to which the Son of God hath annexed innumerable blessings; a word, with which he hath almost universally terminated the divine instructions he hath left us; a word, the practical knowledge of which is, as it were, an epitome of all Christian wisdom. For, to what doth the wisdom of the Gospel tend? To the great, the important business of salvation. On what doth this essential, this one thing needful rest? On death. And what more infallible and necessary means to forewarn us of death, and guard us against its surprise, than watchfulness?

And truly, (says St. Bernard,) the particular circumstances attending death will always be hidden from me; but be they ever

so hidden, I may so take my measures as to be never surprised by them. In spite of whatever reflections and researches I should make through the mazy walks of futurity, I should still be ignorant of the time, the place, and the manner of my death, because these are secrets which the heavenly Father hath put not only in his own power, but in his divine prescience. But without knowing the time of my death, I may live at all times with such attention to my own conduct, that at whatever moment death shall come, it will find me in readiness; without knowing the place of my death, I may in all places await its coming, so as to be nowhere unprepared for it; without knowing the manner of my death, that is, without knowing whether it will be slow or sudden, tranquil or accompanied with violent pains, whether it will leave me the free use of reason, or cloud my understanding, I may take my measures so properly, so cautiously, that it will never be unforeseen. And this was the difference between the prudent and foolish virgins of whom mention is made in the Gospel. The former were not more fully apprised of the moment in which the bridegroom would come than the latter; but in this uncertainty they had the precaution to keep their lamps continually lighted, whereas the others slept, and in their sleep let their lamps go out.

And in this, Christians, we ought to adore the divine providence: I mean, in this dreadful incertitude of death, and in the salutary effects which it always produces. For, by these means, God keeps us to order, and obliges us to have a watchful eye upon ourselves; to measure all our steps, to weigh all our words, to purify all our thoughts, and to regulate all the views and desires of our heart. If it were made known to me when I should die, where I should die, and how I should die, I should live, it may be, in greater tranquillity, but not in equal dependance on God: whereas the uncertainty of the time, the place, and the manner of my death, reduces me to the happy necessity of studying my duty carefully, and endeavouring regularly and constantly to fulfil it. To be wanting one moment in this disposition, I mean, to be wanting in this Christian watchfulness, is (says St. Jerom) to act in contradiction to all the principles and lights of reason, because it is to commit a whole eternity to a single moment.

But if that be the case, it follows that men the most wise and clear-sighted in the common opinion of mankind, are, in reality, blind and stupid. Ah! my brethren (replies St. Chrysostom) the

inference, I own, is but too true; and hath not the Scripture declared it to us in express terms? Hath it not charged openly, on this head, the prudence of the most refined ages with folly? How can we otherwise judge, when we see, to the utter disgrace of the Christian name, such men as we see in every station? Men who prize themselves for their vigilance and dexterity above all others, and neglect the sole business in which it imports them to be vigilant and dexterous; men so attentive to worldly concerns, who abandon to chance the capital concern on which death must decide; men who plod and pore over books, and spend whole months, whole years, in settling and stating accounts, with which they are entrusted by men like themselves, and yet never think of settling or stating the great account which they are bound to lay before the Lord their God; men who never think they can have sufficient security in matters regarding the present life, yet leave all to chance in matters regarding their eternal welfare. Such, however, is the sad infatuation of many Christians; and may it please kind heaven that you be not among them! For, according to the words and expresssion of our Saviour, "Who is that wise and faithful steward" (Luke xii.), who is ever on the watch to be ready to receive the master whom he expects, and by whom he is in dread of being one day surprised? But to drop all figurative modes of speech, and to insist only on some particular points: do we watch, when we defer, till death approaches, to acquit ourselves of duties equally indispensable before God and man? For instance—to discharge debts which increase every year, and leave them to the good or bad faith of an heir, an avaricious heir, who will easily contest them, and elude payment by a thousand chicaneries; to make certain restitutions of which care should be taken, but which are deposited in the breasts of children, for whom they will be a fresh occasion of sin and a cause of damnation; to pay off servants whose wages are most detained from them, and who break in by their importunate, yet reasonable representations, upon the dying person, and upon the zeal of God's ministers who lend him their assistance; to discuss perplexing and intricate points; to clear up difficulties and resolve doubts, the doing of which depends on various and complicated circumstances, which ought to be known, but on which there is not time to dwell; to see an enemy, and be reconciled with him, when we cannot prevail upon ourselves to pardon him, because we have lived in an inveterate hatred, and

send for him only by the way of ceremony, rather than from any religious motive. This detail I shall carry no farther. But to say something more general and essential: do we watch by performing so few good works, by applying so little to Christian observances, by committing sin with such facility, by persisting in it with such indifference, by recurring so seldom to the sacrament of penance, and by laying ourselves open to the consequences of an unforeseen and reprobated death?

Alas! my Brethren, let us try to ward off so dreadful a misfortune. Let us fear death, but let it be in such a manner, that our fear shall be a fence against death itself; and because the most solid advantage we can reap from it is, to be always on the watch, let us watch while we fear, and as much as we fear. Let us often call to mind those familiar but convictive comparisons of St. Chrysostom, by which he intelligibly conveyed to his audience the doctrine I deliver. For, said this father, no one ever waits to refit a vessel, when in open sea she is tossed by the tempest, and beaten by the surges, and in immediate danger of bulging and sinking. No one ever thinks of providing a fortress with military stores, when the enemy hath invested it with lines of circumvallation, and with a formidable army. No one ever sets about furnishing a palace when the prince is at the gates, and on the point of coming in. These natural figures more forcibly demonstrate the necessity of a prompt and assiduous vigilance than the most elaborate discourses and most accurate ratiocination. No, no, adds St. Gregory, it will be too late to prepare for God's judgment when the signs, forerunners of the Son of Man's coming, shall appear, I do not say in the heavens or upon the earth, but within ourselves: when the sun shall be obscured—that is, when our reasoning faculties shall be in the darkness into which the presence and horror of death for the most part throw them: when the moon shall be eclipsed; that is, when our will, emblematically represented by the inconstancy of that luminary, shall be enfeebled, and unable to form any resolution: when the stars shall fall—that is, when our senses shall be disturbed and we shall lose the use of them. Let St. Augustin's excellent reflection be remembered, which, if thoroughly pondered, is worth a whole discourse: that, to die like a Christian, it is not sufficient, when death draws near, to think of it, or even prepare for it, but that we must already have thought of it and prepared for it. The reason is, that the Son of God, whose words are all oracles, and

who includes in one word the most profound mysteries respecting salvation, did not say "prepare," but "be ye prepared." Luke xii. Whereupon, I make this terrible inference: that there is a time when we may sincerely prepare for death, and be reprobated by God. Thus it happened to the foolish virgins already mentioned. They bestirred themselves, they hastened to fetch oil in order to fill their lamps, but too late; the bridegroom was come, and at their return they found the door shut. How many sinners doth the Almighty doom to everlasting perdition, at the very time that they prepare to die, whose actual preparation, by a just judgment, is no impediment to their eternal damnation, forasmuch as it is not an entire and consummate, but only an imperfect and inceptive preparation? They awaken from their lethargy, and take in hand the lamp of faith; but as the divine unction of charity is wanting they are disturbed in mind, are torn with anxiety, and in strong agitation. The bridegroom comes, death snatches them away, the gate of mercy is shut against them, and God declares to them—that "He knows them not."

Let us, therefore, be ready, beloved hearers, let us always be ready; "be ye prepared." However, let not this preparation consist merely of some vague and fruitless projects, in which all our disposedness often terminates at our death, but of deeds and effects, of serious examinations, of frequent confessions, of fervent communions, of holy retirements, of profitable reading, of alms-deeds and prayer, and all the exercises of Christian piety: for in any other supposition it is all delusion. Let us not rely on the vigilance of others. God, it is true, according to the apostle, hath appointed pastors to watch over and direct us; pastors responsible to him for our souls. But, after all, we ourselves must watch; and the vigilance of the pastors of the church would be insufficient to stay the perils of death, if not accompanied and supported by our own. If they neglectfully withold their care and suffer us to perish, the Almighty will call them to an account for our loss, but we shall not be lost the less for that. The rigorous justice with which he will punish them for neglecting their duty will no way diminish that with which he will punish us for neglecting ourselves. For, if he hath threatened them in entrusting them with our souls, to require them from their hands, "I will require his blood from thy hands" (Ezech. xxxi.); I may justly apply to you the same menace, and tell you on the part of the living God: that as he

hath charged you in a special manner with the care of your soul, he will require your soul from your hands.

But which is the method to be used in this so necessary a vigilance? I reduce it to the three following points, which comprise, in brief, the whole doctrine of the Gospel, and are, as I may say, the fundamental principles of our whole conduct respecting death.

First, always to keep ourselves in the state in which we should wish to die; never, at least, to be in a state in which we should have a horror of dying. The reason is, that we are liable to die in every place and at every moment. Now this being laid down as a settled rule, if, beloved hearers, I should address myself to you, and ask you are you ready? what answer would you make? But that which I cannot ask each of you in particular, each of you in particular may ask himself: should I be willing to die in this criminal habit, and carry to the judgment-seat of the Almighty Lord such a number of sins which it hath made me commit, and which it makes me every day commit? Should I be willing to die with this resentment rankling in my heart, at which God is offended, and even the world scandalized? Should I be willing to die with the weight of a certain injustice on my conscience, for which I can expect no forgiveness of God, so long as I have it in my power to repair it, but will not, by making suitable amends? Are you willing, dear brother, are you willing, I say, to die in this manner? If not, it behoves you to quit that state will all possible alertness. For, as many moments as you remain in it, so many times are you liable to die in it, as there is not a moment that you are not exposed to the shafts of death.

Secondly, to perform all our actions with a view to death: that is, to do all things as we should wish at the hour of death to have done. For this end, to set about nothing, to settle nothing, as to the business of the day, without first placing ourselves mentally on our death-bed, and seriously reflecting, in the presence of God, what we then shall think of the present affair, of the design we form, and of the means we use in order to compass it; what will meet with our approbation or disapprobation; what will give us comfort or embitter our thoughts; the manner in which we shall wish to have demeaned ourselves on this occasion, to have spoken our minds in this conversation, to have discharged this duty, this office, this trust, to have complied with the universal obligation of penance, charity, and religion. These ideas thus preconceived—

we esteem nothing, we wish nothing, we say nothing, we do nothing but what is consonant to the law of God; and whatever we esteem, whatever we wish, whatever we say, whatever we do, we esteem it, wish it, say it, do it, in a Christian manner, and with zeal and fervour.

Thirdly, to enter into ourselves, and search our hearts by frequent meditation and self-examination, with a view of coming to a knowledge of ourselves. But what do I mean by a knowledge of ourselves? To know our obligations—the good we should practise but do not practise, and the evil we should shun but do not shun; what ought particularly to be guarded against in our state of life; the lets and helps we meet with in our progress to eternal bliss; what progress we make, and to what deviation we may be subject. To have stated periods, yearly, monthly, weekly periods, for these so solid and important researches. To meditate thereupon, to deliberate with ourselves, to take new resolutions, to bewail the past, to make sure of the future, and without delay to resume fresh ardour. In this manner, according to the expression of the royal prophet, our fear becomes our firmest and surest support, inasmuch as it serves to excite our vigilance: "Thou hast made fear his support." Ps. lxxxviii. Such was the fear which possessed the saints, and such was the fruit which they drew from it. They not only prepared for death by contemplation, but applied their intellectual faculties to the attaining a knowledge of it, by making life itself, as it were, an apprenticeship and exercise of death. And this is what remains for me to explain in the third and last part.

Part III. To serve one's time to learn, as I may say, all the days of one's life, the business of death, and to come by so doing to a perfect knowledge of it, and be an adept in it, seems not a paradox but a contradiction. For, waving refinements on a topic so solid and important as this, every apprenticeship implies two conditions: namely, a frequent repetition of the same thing, and the power of beginning it over again and rectifying it, if at first it failed of success. Now of these two conditions, neither the one or the other is found in death, since we die but once, and since after death, whether holy or criminal, there is no redress: which made the great St. Augustin say that of all faults the most irreparable were those which we commit at our death. Nevertheless, Christians, it is a maxim of all the fathers that we may learn to die, and that of all kinds of knowledge this holds the first place, except the knowledge of God—if yet it be distinguished from the knowledge of

God. There is, say they, an apprenticeship to be made for the learning of death: and it was in this apprenticeship that the saints became proficient. They applied their minds during the course of life to the study of death: and as it is natural to do that in perfection of which one hath a knowledge, nay to which one is habituated by long practice, they breathed out their souls in the odour of sanctity, because they possessed and were thoroughly conversant in the science of death.

Now it depends upon us to follow their example; for I shall lay before you three positions, which concern us as well as them, and which we ought each of us to apply to himself. First, we die daily, according to the words of the divine Spirit; therefore it is easy for us to learn to die. Secondly, the very creatures that surround us do actually teach us, or, to speak more properly, train us up to die; therefore our ignorance is without excuse if we know not how to die. Thirdly, the Christian life to which God hath called us, is in some sort a continual practice of death; therefore we are highly culpable for not being more skilled and more experienced in the art of dying. The deductions are evident, and the premises I shall prove in the order I have mentioned them.

1st. No, Christians, it is not true, in a certain sense, that we die but once. We die every moment; and every moment we have it in our power to die. I do not say without a crime, but with merit, voluntarily and spontaneously. And, indeed, when the Almighty threatened the first man, that death should be the consequence of his disobedience, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. ii.), the dreadful sentence, as St. Irenæus remarks, was executed in Adam the instant he transgressed the precept of the Lord. Otherwise, subjoins the same holy Father, little would have been the efficacy and sincerity of God in the judgment he pronounced. For he did not say to our first parent, thou shalt one day die, thou shalt die at a certain time, thou shalt die after so many years and ages; but he said to him absolutely—thou shalt surely die in the day, at the instant, thou shalt disobey my orders; and it fell out accordingly. From that time forward, Adam, in punishment of his disobedience, became subject to every kind of infirmity: from that time forward, he perceived his constitution grow weaker and weaker, and his body, degraded, if I may so speak, from the privilege of innocence, began to decline, and consequently to die. Now that which was verified

in Adam is equally verified in us; and of this the pagans themselves were sensible. We are greatly mistaken, says one of their sages, in always supposing that death is to come. That is so far from being the case, that a great part of it is already past; and we ought to hold it for a certain truth, that the part of our life which is now elapsed, is under its dominion. But St. Paul expresses it in much clearer terms, and the words of that apostle should be deemed of infinitely superior authority: "I die daily, my brethren," says he, writing to the Corinthians (1 Cor. xv.), "and the glory I receive from you makes me die every day with joy and pleasure."

Now taking it for granted that we die daily, can it be said with propriety that the science of death is not easily acquired? And forasmuch as we die every moment of necessity, what can hinder us from accustoming ourselves to die every moment by choice and of our own accord? I allow, says St. Augustin, improving upon this thought, that our eyes are, as I may say, bewitched with the sight of present objects; but, for the charm in our eyes, a remedy must be sought in our understandings, and that remedy is, thoroughly to comprehend that this body which appears to be alive, is falling actually to decay and mouldering away. You live, continues he, but the very cause of your life brings on your death; and whatever your senses may say to the contrary, it is fit that your reason should rectify their errors, by representing to you that this life, which you take to be life, is only the commencement and progress of death.

2nd. The same father adds: who shall teach us to die, and to what school shall we go, in order to be taught this incomparable lesson? Who shall teach us to die, Christians? All the creatures of the universe, and those especially by which we subsist, and by which we live. For, as the apostle of the Gentiles tells us, it is within ourselves that we shall find all the proofs of a certain death. We need no more than put ourselves the question, and every thing in us will teach us, with a secret but unanimous voice, that die we must; and whatever we may allege in our own behalf, the only answer we shall receive will be—that die we must. You are rich and enjoy an opulent fortune—but you are doomed to die. You have credit and reputation—but you are doomed to die. You are young, and in a way of tasting and enjoying the pleasures of life—but you are doomed to die. You are the idol of mankind—but you are doomed to die. This is the only language we shall hear,

because God, in creating us, engraved in our very essence this general reply, which is made us by all the elements we are composed of; elements at variance among themselves, which destroy one another, and by destroying themselves destroy us too. But let us not stop there: let us cast our eyes around, and we shall find by every being which surrounds us, and which helps to preserve us, we are not only minded that death is our doom, but brought up and practised in the art of dying: for they relinquish us, they break off all intercourse with us, they will have no more communication with us; and this, as St. Augustin ingeniously observes, is a practical death. For, how many things are there with respect to which it may justly be said that we are already dead, and that we die incessantly? The pleasures of youth have forsaken us, and we have forsaken them; the honours which heretofore were paid us are no more, and oblivion, which itself is a kind of death, hath annihilated them in the memory of mankind; and these honours and these pleasures have already abandoned us, so all the rest, I do not say will abandon us, but do actually abandon us, according as we use them. Must we not, therefore, be grossly stupid, if, after so many trials and experiments, we become not proficients in the science of death?

3rd. But that which principally and essentially imposes on us an obligation of this practical knowledge of death, is the profession of Christianity to which God hath called us, as, according to all the rules of Scripture, a Christian life is, properly speaking, neither more nor less than a continual death. Upon this account, St. Paul, who admirably comprehended the truth I speak of, gave the primitive Christians no other conception of what they were than this: "Ye are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." Colos. iii. "Ye are buried with Christ by baptism unto death." Rom. vi. And this, says St. Chrysostom, is not to be understood in a figurative sense, but according to the letter, and in the strict sense and propriety of the terms; for, all the maxims of a Christian life tend only to disengage the soul from the body; that is, to disengage her from the pleasures of the body, from the sensuality of the body, from the slavery of the body. Now, says St. Chrysostom, to disengage the soul from the body is, in other words, to teach her to die. Let us break, says Seneca, that shameful attachment which holds down the spirit in subjection to the flesh, and thereby we shall learn the art of dying. But what the philosophers

said unprofitably, though indeed magnificently—our religion makes a law, which we are bound to comply with, holily and generously: for, it disengages us from the body by mortification, and by so doing makes us enter upon the sacred practice of that death, in which the whole merit of life consists.

Let us follow, therefore, beloved Christians, the holy impulse and attractive of its spirit. Let us manfully disengage ourselves from this body of flesh, which the Scripture so frequently styles the body of death, and not sluggishly wait till the hand of death strips us of it by force, since it is in our power to deprive ourselves of it by virtuous means. The soul that is unwilling to renounce the body till the instant of death is unworthy of God. You would learn the practical methods of dying: one I will impart to you; one without which I fear not to affirm that all the rest are vain and chimerical—disengage your soul from every object you love but God: this, in few words, is the science of death. By voluntary mortification prevent the dolorous operations of death. Death will take from you the use of the senses; make them die beforehand by retrenching whatever is displeasing to God—as freedom of speech, curiosity of the eyes, delicacy of the palate. Death will strip you of your worldly substance: resign it now in mind and affection. Far from endeavouring to gratify that insatiable thirst of accumulating treasure upon treasure, take a holy pride, in the presence of God, in distributing them to the needy. Far from wishing for what you have not, give away without reluctance that which you possess. Death will separate you from your dearest friends; withdraw from them betimes in a Christian manner, and bid adieu for ever to libertine company, dangerous conversation, reciprocation of tenderness, suspected intercourses. Make no partial defalcation, and let it not be forgotten that mortification, to fulfil the office of death, and to have its proper qualities, must be absolute and universal; as it cannot be said that a man is dead because he hath lost his speech or his sight, but must, for that, lose all the powers of action and sensation; so we cannot affirm that a Christian is mortified for having bridled some few of his sensual appetites, but it is farther requisite that he curb them all, and submit them all to the Almighty will. When misfortunes, afflictions, calamities, losses, shall fall to your share, raise your mind to God, and inwardly tell him in the spirit of faith—Blessed be thy holy name, O Lord! This is but so much anticipated of what I must have done at my

death; what you now take from me would have been a tribute to death, but I am happily rid of it; by it I should have been held in subjection to the world; but you have broken my chains, and your infinite mercy hath so well contrived it, that if I but ever so little answer your wise designs, I shall find nothing dreadful or stinging in death.

If these, beloved hearers, be your dispositions, thank heaven, they are neither more nor less than preparation for death. Nor tell me that this is a melancholy life. What though it should be so, this melancholy life is closed by a death replete with consolation, the death of those who die in the Lord. Now a holy life is a blessing that cannot either be prized too high or purchased too dear. I proceed farther, and am bold enough to say, that the life of a Christian, dead to the world and to all things calculated to create in the heart an attachment to the world, is a thousand times more easy and tranquil, and of course more happy than that of worldlings, so eager in the pursuits of worldly enjoyments, and in such fear and apprehension of losing them by being sent out of their beloved world. This one reflection, I have nothing to stop me, and am ready to depart whenever it shall please the Almighty to call me, is the most pleasing tranquillity and substantial happiness of which an immortal soul is susceptible.

But to live in this manner is not to live; or, if it be to live, it is to live in such a manner as if one did not live. Alas! Christians, do I require more of you than did St. Paul of the faithful in his time? "It remaineth," says he, "that they who use this world use it as though they used it not." 1 Cor. 7. That is, my brethren, it is your duty to live as if you lived not—to live without loving either life or the things appertaining to life. Live in a conformity to the will of God, to the end you may live with him in eternal glory.

SERMON XXVII.

ON FINAL IMPENITENCE.

"*Jesus said unto them: I go, and you shall seek me, and you shall die in your sin.*" JOHN viii.

SIN and death, beloved Christians, are two great evils: sin, by which death made its way into the world, and death by which God takes vengeance for sin; sin which degrades us in the order of grace, and death which destroys us in the order of nature; sin which made man fall from the blessed state in which God had created him; and death which takes from him the good things of this world, of which, after sin had worked his destruction, God had allowed him the use. But after all, neither death nor sin, considered disjunctively, can be accounted the greatest evil. For, death without sin may be holy and precious in the sight of God. Death without sin was in Jesus a source of graces and merits; and sin without death, as we learn from theology, was in the predestinate both a cause and efficient of their predestination. Death without sin put the finishing hand to Mary's sanctification, and sin without death became to Magdalen a motive of conversion. But the sovereign evil, and the most to be dreaded, is sin and death united together; death, which stamps the sinner's final impenitence with eternal reprobation, and sin, which impresses its indelible character of evilness on death. Death, which makes sin for ever irremissible, and sin, which makes death everlastingly criminal. This strikes me, Christians, and should likewise strike you, with horror and dismay; for the Almighty God hath nothing more terrible than this in the treasures of his wrath; with this our blessed Saviour threatened the Jewish people; and from this it imports us, as well as the Jews, to catch at every possible means of preservation.

It was a very melancholy truth for the Jews, founded on our Saviour's own words, that after having spent their days in sin, "they should die in their sin." Now in what sense must this oracle of God be understood? for, it is fit we should understand it, as the Saviour of the world addresses himself to us in the persons

of the Jews, and on a subject, too, of no less importance than that of reprobation. Was this a threat only, which Jesus Christ, with a view of making them acknowledge him for the Messiah, uttered against that incredulous nation? or, was it a definite decree by which he would notify that the measure of their crimes was already filled up, and that there was no pardon or indulgence to be hoped for them on the part of God. St. Chrysostom interprets it in the favourable sense, deeming it no more than a simple commination, which declared to the Jews what they had to apprehend if they persisted any longer in their obstinacy and infidelity? In like manner as Jonas, preaching to the Ninevites, announced to them, that "As yet forty days, and Nineve should be destroyed." Jonas iii. St. Jerom adheres to the literal exposition; and his opinion is, that the Son of God spoke not only as a prophet to intimidate the Jews, but as a judge and sovereign pronounced their condemnation. That is, he not only pointed out the danger they were in of immediate reprobation, but in express terms declared that their reprobation was already completed. For, when God, in the Scriptures, means only to threaten, he always subjoins conditions to his threats, which suspend their effect, and which soften and moderate them. Thus he tells Adam: "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." Gen. ii. Whereas the proposition of our Saviour is absolute, when he tells the Jews that "They shall die in their sin."

But, beloved Christians, whether it be a decree, or a menace only, is it not enough to fill the mind with horror, that it is the menace of a God, who never speaks in vain, who never speaks from passion, who never speaks without unbounded knowledge, but who penetrates into the secret recesses of the heart, beholds the whole prospect of futurity, and foresees the catastrophe of our mortal life? We must not, however, be satisfied with this; we must learn from experience, and see if it verifies, with regard to sinners, this prophecy of our Saviour: for, next to God's word, the most convincing, the most plain and obvious proof is experience. How then do almost all sinners die? I mean those sinners, who are such by profession, who are obstinate in their enquiries, who never in their life did true penance: how do they die? Ah! my brethren, we must here acknowledge, that as a most amiable and benificent Providence watches over the righteous, so a very severe and terrible one observes the ways of the wicked. They

die, these inveterate sinners, as they lived. They lived in sin—and they die in sin. They lived in God's hatred—and they die in God's hatred. They lived like pagans—and they die like reprobates. This is what we learn from experience.

But in order to convey a more clear and accurate idea of this matter, and to form the plan of this discourse, I shall divide them into three different classes. For some die in their inordination of actual impenitence; others without any sense or show of repentance; and others in the performance, or, rather delusion of false repentance. Of these, the first are far the most criminal, as they add to all the sins of their life past that of final impenitence. The second are more unfortunate, and, for that reason, the more deserving of compassion, as, against their will, and without thinking of it, they receive no aid or advantage from penance. The last participate in the said condemnation of the one and the other; and though neither so criminal as the first, nor so unfortunate as the second, they are, nevertheless, unfortunate, because blind and criminal—being impenitent. Thus I call the impenitence of the first a criminal impenitence; the impenitence of the second an unfortunate impenitence; and the impenitence of the last a secret, or latent impenitence; or, if you will, a false repentance, which is nothing at bottom but a real impenitence. This is not all: for, after having observed these three characteristics of sinners who die in the guilt of their sin I must add three reflections, in order to let you see how the impenitence of life leads to final impenitence: be attentive to this. First, I say, that an impenitent life leads to a death criminally impenitent, and that by way of disposition. Secondly, I say, that an impenitent life leads to a death unfortunately impenitent, and that by way of punishment. Thirdly, I say, that an impenitent life leads to a death secretly and knowingly impenitent, or to false repentance, and that by way of delusion.

Part I. We may die in the actual inordination and sin of final impenitence, two different ways—either by a deliberate will absolutely to give up all thoughts of repentance, and that even at the time of our approaching dissolution, or by a criminal omission of the ordinary means which God hath pointed out, in order to the recovering of his lost favour and to the doing of penance. Now, I say that deaths of these two kinds are so common in the world as to justify the prediction of the Son of God, "You shall die in your sin." Let us fathom, dear Christians, this gulf of ini-

quity; let us use our endeavours to find out its depth, and to make this consideration of greater utility, let us not be afraid to enter upon a detail which alone will suffice to prove the most terrible of all Christian verities.

1st. When I speak of dying with a "deliberate will" absolutely to give up all thoughts of repentance, do not, I pray you, take my meaning wrong. I speak not here of that which may happen, and which sometimes happens, through an affected impenitence, when the sinner, being under an absolute necessity of quitting life, refuses to acknowledge the existence of him from whom he received it, and to whom he is on the point of giving a strict account of it; and, ready to appear before the judgment seat of God, says, like the perverse, unbelieving Jews, "I will not serve," I will not humble myself; for although we have instances of this nature, and those who pass for atheists, or appear such at least by their manners and conduct, are liable to terminate their lives in that manner; yet such examples (as St. Chrysostom observes) are so very monstrous, that of themselves they fill the mind with horror; and a minister of the Gospel, rather than offend the piety of his audience, had better suppress than set about to expose them. Thus died the infamous apostate Julian, vomiting against heaven ten thousand blasphemies, while with his blood he vomited out his sacrilegious soul. Thus have died so many enemies of God, whose manner of dying, as deplorable as impious, hath often against their will, borne witness to the sovereign power and divinity of that First Cause and Supreme Being, whom they had always disavowed, or whom, more probably, they had always endeavoured but in vain to disavow. Thus every day die I know not how many worldlings, who, after having lived without faith, without law, without religion, without conscience, are still so rash, perverse, and headstrong, as to crown the work by a diabolical perseverance in their libertine ways. But these are monsters in the order of grace; monsters on whom we should not cast our eyes, any more than is needful in order to detest them and hold them in execration.

It is not, therefore, by such examples that I would make good the oracle of our blessed Saviour. I speak of numberless other sinners, in whom the state of impenitence, such as I have described it, proceeds as well from the weakness of their heads as from the wickedness of their hearts, or, more properly, from both together. And in order that you may the more distinctly and precisely com-

prehend my meaning, I speak of a man whose heart is filled with gall and bitterness, and who after living in rancour, hatred, and scandalous animosity, dies without desiring, but protesting his utter inability to be reconciled; or, if he should be reconciled to outward appearance, saying within himself that he will not. Witness that Christian, who, even upon the point of undergoing martyrdom, obstinately refused to embrace his enemy, though his enemy, on his knees and in an humble posture, implored his forgiveness. Now without descanting on these circumstances, how many similar deaths do we see all over Christendom? Deaths unattended with reconciliation; deaths accompanied with all the sourness of resentment and revenge; deaths at which all those accommodations, and all those interviews, which are often brought about with much parade, and almost always with little fruit, are nothing but mere deceitful ceremonies; deaths, at which, by a political maxim, and an ill-judged fortitude, men are more untractable and inflexible than ever, with a view to gain esteem for their past conduct, and for that inveteracy in which they were grown old; or, in other words, to execute the decree pronounced by our Saviour, "You shall die in your sin."

I speak of a man, who, finding at his death his unjust acquisitions to lean heavily on his conscience, acquisitions wherewith he raised a great fortune, and purchased large estates, cannot even then be induced to restore them; on the one hand, groaning under the weight of the sin that oppresses and overwhelms him, and on the other refusing to divest himself of anything; divided between the torments of hell which he dreads, and avarice—the ruling passion of his heart; but otherwise chosing rather to abandon his soul, than to repair his injustices—than to provide for the idemnification of those he hath imposed on—than to acknowledge the debts which a dishonest mind forbad him to allow of—than to fulfil the obligations of which he is convinced, and of which by the secret stings and remorses of a guilty conscience he is sufficiently reminded; in a word, than to part with the prey, for a short space of time, of which God will shortly deprive him for ever. Now what is more common among mankind, than this blind obstinacy to retain that which cannot be lawfully possessed? Among so many of the rich, who are unjustly possessed of the property of others, where is the man, who, to die like a Christian, is willing to die poor? And doth not, therefore, the curse in the Gospel, "You shall die

in your sin," seem annexed to their condition in a special manner? I speak of a man, who, enslaved by a passion, carries it with him to the end, and dies in adoration of an earthly object; an object, from which there is no disengaging him, even when upon the point of being disengaged by death from all sublunary things: a man, who, influenced by a hellish faithfulness, or rather by a sacrifice the most horrid and abominable, without any regard to the eternal flames with which his God threatens him, is finally consumed by the heat as it were of an impure fire. Now you know, beloved hearers, that this is the fate of numberless sensual and voluptuous Christians. For this I appeal to your own experience. What is the consequence of those criminal engagements but such a death—a death worse than pagan, at which, to the last, the expiring sinner pants after that with which he had been long so strangely infatuated? A death, at which constant, to a degree of extravagance, to a degree of frenzy, he applies all his care, and consecrates his last wishes to an infamous passion of which he scarcely makes a matter of conscience. A death, at which, though sunk in its bosom, the violent, the only grief that affects him is, not his having sought by the suggestions of inclination the mischievous cause of his disorderly life, but his being by necessity compelled to relinquish it.

In fine, I speak of a man, who, after having long been a rebel to his God, after having lived without fear of his judgments, dies without placing any hope in his mercy; who, when the priests, by pious exhortation, would stir him up to confidence, passes judgment on himself, a judgment (says St. Augustin) not exact and rigorous, but cruel and stupid, as he doth it independently of the grace and redemption of Christ our Lord, and thereby, like Cain, falls into despair, and concludes with that treacherous fratricidious brother, "My iniquity is too great for me to deserve pardon" (Gen. iv.); if there be a God in heaven, I am doomed eternally to abide in hell. Now is not this the rock on which an innumerable multitude of sinners split, especially those who by frequent relapses have not only lost all hopes of forgiveness, but would even be ashamed, if I may so speak, to turn towards God and put confidence in him. For that shame, which all their life long they could not get the better of, redoubles its force and overpowers them at their death; and then, strongly affected with their own unworthiness, and feelingly struck with God's greatness and justice, they

are disturbed in mind, they despair of salvation, they make, like Judas, even their sorrow and repentance the means of reprobation. This, I say, is dying with reflection, is dying with design, in final impenitence.

2nd. There is another kind of death equally common, and equally lamentable, when by a criminal omission, though not directly voluntary, a person is precluded from the grace of repentance and debarred from the necessary means of obtaining it. For, says St. Augustin, reasoning with a sinner, if, when death draws near, and Almighty God calls you, you put not yourself as soon as possible in the best condition to appear before him; if, when so safe a harbour as that of a speedy and sincere repentance is open to receive you, you enter not into it and anchor not in safety; if you slip the precious moments, the favourable opportunities which Providence afforded you during the course of your illness; if by too great attention to the relief of your body you forget to make due provision for your soul, and reject instead of asking for the wholesome remedies which are charitably offered you; if you banish from your mind, through servile fear, the thoughts of death as much as possible, unwilling to lend an ear to pious admonitions, but willing to be flattered and deceived in the thing in which it was requisite in a special manner you should be dealt with sincerely—if you make no effort, through a natural infirmity, to surmount the frights arising therefrom, and to attend properly, at least at this crisis, in this last extremity, to the greatest and most important of all affairs; if you hearken to relations and false friends, who dissuade you from it; if you still let your thoughts, by a deplorable perversity, be taken up with your family, while you have scarce wherewithal to provide for eternity, ah! brother, concludes St. Augustin, change then your language and reform your notions. In this state of impenitence, to say that death is the greatest of misfortunes is to speak improperly; we must say that it is the greatest and most inexcusable of all crimes. To say that you die in your sinful state is to explain yourself by halves; you must say that you die in your sinful state by a final sin which surpasses all others. For, what are all the sins of life together if put in comparison with this alone? In what can one carry one's injustice farther against God and one's self? To see one's self reduced to that fatal time, that time after which there is no more time, and yet procrastinate; to be at the gates of hell and yet take no pains to withdraw from them; to be

on the point of perishing and yet hesitate to do one's self the most pressing duty, by taking wise measures to avoid perishing—can this be conceived? Can this be forgiven? Nevertheless, Christians, it is thus we are misled by the spirit of the world whenever we follow it. Men are surrounded, as the Scripture speaks, with the sorrows of death and the perils of hell, and yet they venture, they temporize, they keep a good heart, they put off till the morrow; they deceive themselves by fetches, evasions, and subterfuges; in a word, they die in the disfavour and aversion of God. A death doubly criminal—by the impenitence of the life which preceded it, and by the final impenitence which now attends it.

I have further added, that there is between the impenitence of life and final impenitence so great a connexion as to make the one almost infallibly lead to the other. As how? By way of disposition; that is, by inveterate use, by strong attachment, and by hardness of heart; a gradual progress, which the fathers lay down in the description they give of this first class of impenitent sinners; a constant truth, the sole exposition of which will be sufficient to force conviction.

By inveterate use: for, to expect that habits contracted in life shall suddenly vanish at the approach of death, and that another mind, heart, and will shall be acquired in a moment is the grossest of errors. I have said, and you know it well, that we die as we have lived; and the presence of death is so far from weakening habits and customs already contracted, that it seems to awaken them still more, and give them fresh strength; for if ever we act by custom and habit, it is particularly so at the hour of death. A thousand times in your life you put off your conversion—you will put it off at your death. A thousand times in your life you said in a month, in a year—at your death you will say in a day, in an hour. In your lifetime you have been a man of desires, resolutions, and promises, without execution—at your death you will desire, resolve and promise, but will do nothing. And say not that you will be determined by the extremity of the danger—it is a great mistake. It will determine you to desire, because you have a habit of it; it will determine you to resolve and promise, because such is your custom; but in desiring by custom, in resolving and promising by custom, and by custom carrying nothing into execution—"You shall die in your sin."

By strong attachment: for the impenitence of life, according to

the wiseman, forms a chain of sins, which keeps us, almost against our will, in perpetual bondage: "His own iniquities take the wicked man, and he is fast bound with the cords of his sins." Prov. v. I know that God may use his absolute power, and at the instant of death may break every link; but I know, likewise, that without a miraculous operation of grace they are not broken in a moment, and that he rarely condescends to work such miracles. And, in fact, we see an inveterate sinner on the point of expiring in that rueful state—that state in which St. Augustin represents himself, when he says: "I sighed, hard-held, not with outward chains, but by my own will." Convinced, O my God, that there was no time left for deliberation or choice, and that to be effectually converted to you I must renounce my sin, I sighed and panted after the happiness of the righteous. But, though I sighed and panted, I was bound and shackled, not with outward chains, but by my own will. My will the enemy still held in his power; and that concatenation of habitual orders, like so many rings linked one within another, kept me, notwithstanding all the terrors of death, under the yoke of sin.

By hardness of heart: for the will being, as I suppose, uninterruptedly criminal, and never repenting, in process of time becomes hardened in sin. If the unhappy sinner, afflicted and sorrowful at his own wretchedness, had from time to time turned his heart to God, and had recovered from his fall by generous efforts, as often as he yielded to the allurements of the world and suggestions of the flesh, notwithstanding his inconstancy he would have drawn advantage from the use of penance: penance, though followed by weaknesses and relapses, would have destroyed that in him which sin hath occasioned; but having all along added iniquity, to iniquity, how is it possible he should not arrive to the summit of wickedness, and contract that callousness which criminal habits are capable of producing? And what likelihood is there that, hardened in this manner, he should all at once become pliant and flexible to the attractives of grace? People, therefore, die in sin because they lived in sin; and they die in it, as I have said, committing a fresh sin, because that same impenitence is the very consummation of all sins whatever—and this is what I called a criminal impenitence. Proceed we now to the unfortunate impenitence which shall be the subject of the second part.

Part II. In order to die in the favour of heaven, it is not enough

that the sinner be resolved, one day or other, to have recourse to penance, and that he purpose, at least at the hour of death, to relinquish sin. For whereas the grace of final repentance depends not absolutely on the will of man, and by a secret judgment of the supreme Ruler is connected with a thousand various circumstances which are out of his power, it is necessary, to the end he may enjoy the happiness of asking and obtaining the Almighty's pardon, that, to effect his conversion, all these circumstances concur at his death. Should one only be wanting, his hopes are frustrated; and though ten thousand times he should beseech God that "His soul might die the death of the righteous" (Numb. xxiii.), his desires are unprofitable and his hopes unavailing. The reason is this: in the ordinary course of divine Providence an obstacle arising, to all appearance, from natural causes, but yet of a divine and superior order, made the repentance impossible on which he relied, and which he regarded as his last resource. It may, therefore, so happen that without being guilty of a fresh sin, one may die in his sins, because one may die in an involuntary, nay unavoidable want of repentance. And this is what I call an unfortunate impenitence, and what I consider as another abyss, not of the corruption of the human heart, but of the adorable and impenetrable justice of God; a justice which appears in all its lustre at the death of these sinners, taken unawares, deluded, cast off, excluded even in this life from the way of salvation—sinners in whom this Gospel truth is most palpably fulfilled—"You shall die in your sin." Renew, Christians, renew your attention.

When an account is brought you of a sudden death, and, in the consternation with which such events are wont to fill the mind, you are told that this man, who enjoyed perfect health, was deprived of utterance and snatched away all at once; that such a one, in the midst of sports and revels, or engaged in a fray, dropped down upon the spot without motion or life; that one fell, unsuspecting, by the hand of an assassin—or that another, overwhelmed by the fall of an edifice, lay buried in its ruins: when a recital is made of these and many other kinds of death, and when, for the best reasons that can be drawn from probability, they not only seem sudden, but unforeseen and unsuspected, as these were notorious and scandalous sinners, you are amazed and terrified; and, without pretending to pass judgment on them, doubt not that the menace of our blessed Saviour, "You shall die in your sin," is verified to

the letter. But at the same time, Christians, you comfort yourselves with the thought that these accidents are uncommon and extraordinary; and accordingly, how frequent soever they may be, you find means to invalidate the salutary impressions which they might and which they ought to make on your hearts. But give me leave to tell you that you are greatly mistaken. Deaths like these are neither so rare nor so singular as you would persuade yourselves; and I maintain, in the strictest acceptation of the word, that so far as it relates to conscience and salvation, there is nothing more common than a sudden death. The proof shall follow the assertion.

That I call, with St. Augustin, a sudden death when the sinner, all at once, falls into a situation which renders him incapable of conversion or repentance. Now what in the world is more ordinary than this? Nay, what more universal? Have we not before our eyes innumerable instances of it every day? Though a deadly fall, an apoplectic fit, a stab in the dark makes a greater noise and raises more astonishment; how many other causes, which affect us less, reduce us to this unfortunate state of impenitence? Lightheadedness in the heat of a burning fever, an uninterrupted delirium, an aberration of mind, a mortal somnolency. Do not all these incessantly produce the same effect? Do not they, by depriving the dying man of the use of reason, deprive him of all possible means of conversion? Put a sinner in any one of these circumstances, is it not true that he is already dead as a Christian, though not as yet absolutely dead as a man? I grant he may struggle whole days together for the poor remains of an animal life, which can serve to make him languish in wretchedness, but can naught avail him, as the rational and supernatural life is extinct. What can grace do, all powerful as it, when nature, which ought to co-operate with it, is unable to act?

To say nothing of those symptoms, by which it appears that the reasoning faculty is entirely clouded, the loss of strength and pain of body are sufficient of themselves to deprive the mind of all reflection, and consequently to shut us out from the ways of repentance. How many sinners, even during the progress of the most regular diseases, thus die a sudden death, not indeed in the opinion of mankind, but in the eyes of God? They die, says St. Chrysostom without a fresh sin, because they are no longer in condition to commit it; they die without incurring the reproach of misusing

the time which God gives them, because, properly speaking, they are unable to misuse it, or to make any use of it; they die in an impenitence, which, however final is not imputed to them, because unknown and not free. Yet they die in their sin, and the malediction of Christ Jesus, "You shall die in your sin," is not consummated the less for that.

What shall I say of those who die, not indeed in a culpable, but deplorable ignorance of the immediate danger to which they are exposed? For thence the same consequences and effects come, thence comes reprobation. Had the sick man been admonished that the time being short he must take heed of himself, he would have regulated his conscience and have died like a Christian. But inasmuch as they gave him to understand the contrary, and by an ill-judged caution led him into error, he dies unrepenting, he dies unconverted. Was it a crime to be ignorant of the impending danger? No, Christians; for he would gladly have known it. To what then must it be ascribed? To the weakness of a confessor; to the injudicious and deceitful conjecture of a physician; to the respectful hesitation and indiscretion of a servant; to the ill-timed circumspection of a fond wife; to the interest of some; to the negligence of others; to what ever you please, my brethren. St. Augustin says: however it be, the dying man suffers for it; and being ignorant of the extremity to which he is reduced, he dies in God's hatred, and in a state of damnation. How then! say you. Was it just that he should perish through another's fault? Ah! replies this father, as he doth not perish through the fault of another, he is not condemned for another's fault, but for his own sin. God, on whose supreme will it depends, permits the sin which might have been expiated at the hour of death to remain unexpiated through another's fault, and the sinner—instead of enjoying the gifts of grace and mercy to which he might have aspired—to be doomed to undergo never-ending stripes.

But although the sinner, now laid on his death-bed, pants after the remedy; though he asks for it and shews that he ardently wishes for it, what is often the case? Ah! Christians, this is to be unfortunate in the last degree; and here we must cry out, O the depth of God's counsels! This dying sinner, like the unfortunate Esau, who, as the apostle says, "Found no place of repentance, though with tears he sought it" (Heb. xii.); this dying sinner, eager as he is to have recourse to the public fountains of grace,

that is, to the sacraments of Christ our Lord, may still be one of those on whom the curse of the Saviour of mankind falls; and as these fountains, which are open and accessible to all the world, are not so to him—"he dies in his sin."

Of this we have been witnesses, of this we have heard mentioned a thousand times: a man is taken unawares, and when he least expects it. At the gates of death, and in the horror which is caused by so pressing a danger, he would turn to account the short remains of life. All his faith is awakened. He is terrified at the image of an angry God, and by his looks conjures all those who approach him, to lend him their aid. He would cry, like Job, "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, at least O ye my friends" (Job xix.), and while others are busy about a body which death will soon lay in the grave, give me your assistance towards the saving of my soul. In fact, they bestir themselves, they spare no pains: a priest, a confessor, is sought for on all sides; but this priest, this confessor, is no where to be found; a thousand cross accidents concur to retard him; what never before delayed him delays him now: at last he comes, but comes too late, when the sick-man, senseless, speechless, and gasping, neither knows what he says, nor can give him an answer. And whence comes this? To fulfil the other part of our Lord's prediction, "You shall seek me," although not in my own person, but in the persons of my ministers and dispensers of my sacraments, "and you shall not find me;" and because you shall not find me in the persons of my ministers, nor shall have wherewith to make up the deficiency by a pure and perfect act of love—"You shall die in your sin."

I say more: this priest, the vicar and minister of Christ Jesus, will be found; but by another still more terrible means that leads to reprobation, with all the power which the church hath conferred on him, he will want the talent, the divine gift, requisite for the assisting of a dying person. Instead of moving him, he will give him disgust; instead of instructing him, he will perplex and disturb him. The keys of heaven, he will hold in his hand, but will want the key that should open a passage to, and soften his heart. For God, beloved hearers, doth not use instruments of every kind to perform miracles. As he doth not convert by every kind of grace, so neither doth he chose that we be converted by every kind of person. If, seeing the disposition of this sick man, he had had an experienced, zealous director, full of the spirit and unction of God,

he would have died a saint; but being destitute of such a man, and having cause to complain, like the man in the Gospel sick of the palsy, "I have no man" (John v.), he dies impenitent. Now I ask again, did all these misfortunes make him more criminal in the sight of God? No: but his past crimes, of which he was guilty, joined to these misfortunes, of which he was innocent, without a fresh sin, made him die in impenitence, made him "die in his sin."

A dreadful, but just chastisement of heaven! Thus an impenitent life leads to an impenitent death by way of punishment, and how often hath God declared this in the Scriptures? How often hath the Saviour of men admonished us of it in the Gospel? For what other construction can be put on those threats so express, so clear, and so often repeated? I have called upon you, and you have shut your ears to my voice, you have despised me; but the day will come, when in my turn I shall despise you, when without warning you I shall strike you. What means those figures so remarkably expressive of the foolish virgins who are buried in sleep, and whose lamps are out at the coming of the bridegroom? Of the master who suddenly appears in his house, and perceiving the revelry and oppression of a servant orders him to be cast into outer darkness? Of the thief who hides himself, and comes in the night? Have we reason to complain when the Lord punisheth us in this manner? May he not make use of his supreme right, and take us in whatever conjecture he pleases? May he not, especially after having long and patiently waited, after having strongly pressed and solicited? You have not turned the time he gave you to advantage: he will deprive you of it; you have wearied out his patience; his anger will break forth; you would not return to him when it was in your power; it will not be in your power, though you would return to him; you have forgotten him in your life, he will forget you at your death. For this requital, as St. Augustin remarks, is just and natural, and how fatal soever, it is but your desert: contempt for contempt, inattention for inattention. Not but that God oftentimes affords whatever is necessary, as to time and means, to the greatest sinners. But, on such occasions, they die neither in a criminal nor unfortunate impenitence; it generally happens that the impenitence they die in is secret and hidden: and this is the subject of the third and last part.

PART III. It must be allowed, Christians, and experience shows us, that God sometimes grants to the sinners of this world, after

having spent their lives in wickedness, both time and means to repent at their death. I know moreover, and I grant that, in fact, many then have recourse to the mercy of God, and address themselves to him, and seemingly return to him by a sincere repentance. But what I have to add, ought to appear to you as it doth to me, dreadful and mortifying: namely, that every repentance is not acceptable at God's tribunal. The reason is, that every repentance is not efficacious, as there are thousands and thousands which are false and deceitful, on which it were folly to place any dependance, and from which we can expect no fruit of salvation. If, therefore, the sinner, misguided and led astray by specious appearances, should form wrong notions in his very repentance, what is he to come to? A most deplorable situation! To know that he is guilty, and not know that he is penitent! To have all the external appearance of penitence, and pernaps not the substance! Hence it follows, that what should be a source of comfort to the sinner is the cause of his uneasiness; that what to appearance ought to be his salvation is often what ruins him; and that although he dies in the exercise of penance, he is liable, notwithstanding, to be lost for ever, because he is liable to die in his sin. This, beloved hearers, we learn from religion; and on this is founded the advice of the wiseman, who bids us be afraid for sins forgiven; because, says St. Chrysostom, in our regard they can only, at most, be presumed such; "Of sins forgiven be not without fear." Eccles. v.

Now if this be the case, with regard to sinners of all denominations, we must say with truth, that it is properly the characteristic which distinguishes those who return not to God for a long course of years, and till death approaches. For, far from depending on the efficacy of their repentance, they should positively mistrust it. In support of my assertion, I shall adduce three reasons, which are borrowed from St. Augustin. First, because nothing, in itself, is more difficult for man than true repentance. Secondly, because true repentance is at no time more difficult than at the hour of death. Thirdly, because of all those who find it hard to repent at the hour of death, it is hardest for those who have neglected it totally during the course of life. Three incontestible propositions, which, if duly pondered, must necessarily induce the sinners of the age to set about a speedy and sincere conversion. Let nothing of what I shall advance escape you; it is all worthy of your serious attention.

1st. Nothing is more difficult than true repentance: for, in order to obtain it, a man must work a total change in his heart. He must hate himself, must renounce himself, must divest himself of every thing, must destroy in himself the old man, and must reduce himself, as it were, to a state of annihilation: that is, he must cease to be what he was, and must become a new man. He must conceive an abhorrence of what appeared most pleasing, and must conceive an affection for what he most abhorred. He must indulge no passion but for inward resistance. All the senses must be held in captivity. His mind must be reduced to perfect submission, and his body exercised in spiritual warfare and mortification. For in this consists, I do not say the perfection, but the essence and groundwork of Chistian penitence. Now I leave you to judge if this be attainable without great difficulty.

2nd. True repentence is at no time more difficult than at the hour of death: for, says St. Augustin, at the hour of death it is not you that abandon sin, it is sin that abandons you; it is not you that quit the world, it is the world that quits you; it is not you that break your chains, your chains are broken by the general dissolubility of human nature. Now that your repentance may be such as it ought to be in the presence of God, this separation, this disengagement, this disunion must come from yourself. You will tell me that the one is subservient to the other, and that we forsake things more easily when they forsake us. But I answer with St. Ambrose, that the case is quite otherwise, and that we are never more passionately, more ardently fond of the object of our desires, than when by some superior power we are dissevered from it, and it is irrecoverably lost to us. On such occasions, to bear our mortification is all we can do. But to wean our affections from such an object, and wean them voluntarily, which nevertheless is essential to true penance, is repugnant to the nature of the human heart, and requires the greatest efforts to compass it.

3rd. But who are they, particularly, that find at their death insurmountable obstacles to true repentance, and for whom it is sometimes, in some sort, impossible? Ah! Christians, for those sinners, who, obstinate in their viciousness, are utterly unaccustomed to it, and persist in a habit and state of impenitence. For, what is the consequence of that obduracy in which they have lived, and that presumption of mind which induces them to believe, at the hour of death, that they are desirous of conversion? It is, that

their repentance, to say nothing worse, is mostly insufficient. The reason is this: it is neither voluntary in its principle nor supernatural in its motive. A forced repentance, a repentance purely natural, two qualities peculiar to the repentance of the devils in hell, and of sinners at their death.

A forced repentance: I am bold enough to defy the most presumptuous sinner not to agree to this. For where is the liberty when the heart is moved by no spring but that either of servile fear or of inevitable necessity? Can it be said to be a free renunciation to sin, when we only renounce it because we are no longer in a capacity to commit it? Can it be said to be a free submission to God, when we only submit to him, because we crouch under the sword of his justice, and are incapable of defence? Can it be said to be a free separation from the world, when we only separate from it because it is no longer in our power to enjoy it? Nevertheless, repentance, to be efficacious and true, must be voluntary and free; and if it be not, though it were as lively and feeling as that of Esau, which, according to the Scripture, made him "Roar out with a loud voice" (Gen. xxvii.), it is the repentance of a castaway, of a sinner doomed to eternal destruction. Hence the fathers are unanimous in decrying a death-bed repentance, in terms sufficient not only to fill the sinner with consternation, but to drive him to despair. Hence the church, being authorized to judge in such cases, had so little reliance, heretofore, on repentances of this nature, that, without absolutely rejecting them, for fear of setting bounds to the mercy of God, she exerted her discipline to the utmost rigour with regard to such penitents, in order to convince us how much she suspected the sincerity of their repentance. Hence, according to the ancient canons, cited in the councils, those who neglected to ask for baptism till the end of their days, were not acknowledged, it seems, to be Christians, but with reserve, insomuch that they were accounted to have incurred irregularity; and for this St. Cyprian gives the following reason: they were looked upon as men who served God by constraint, and only gave themselves to him because they could not help it. And truly, says St. Augustin, whoever condemns the irregularities of his life, merely because reduced to the necessity of quitting it, shews but too plainly that his condemning them proceeds not from good will, but from mere necessity.

A natural and quite human repentance; that is, a repentance

which hath neither God nor sin, for its object. For, adds St. Augustin, what are these supposed penitents afraid of? Are they afraid of losing God, of displeasing God, of incurring the unpropitious regard of God? No, my brethren, answers this holy doctor, nothing of all that; and the proof is evident, because so long as they had nothing beside to fear, they entertained not a thought of their conversion to him: they are afraid of burning, but not of sinning. Now it hence appears that their repentance is ineffectual because they are not instigated either by the grace of God, or by the spirit of God, but by self-love. To repent in this manner, it is fully sufficient, without loving God, to love one's self. But to repent like a Christian, to recover the grace and favour of God, it is not sufficient to love one's self. We therefore may die in the exercise of repentance, and yet die in our sin, because sin is not destroyed by every repentance; and if any repentance is unable to destroy it, it is that which we are speaking of. This made St. Gregory, pope, conclude, that more sinners perished in the Christian religion by false repentance, than by utter impenitence; and consequently that the prediction of our blessed Lord comprises more than we are generally aware of, when he says in clear terms, that "We shall die in our sin."

This inference disturbs you. But is it I, Christians, who make it? Or could I suppress it or weaken it, without prevarication and betraying my ministry? Could I make the holy fathers speak otherwise than they have spoken? Or blot out of the Gospel what is written therein? Affrighted as I am, should I let you slumber in a deceitful security, and not share the fright with you which I feel myself? I know, beloved hearers, that what is impossible for man is not so for God; and that he hath it in his power, being master of our hearts, to work a perfect repentance in the most impenitent heart. I know that in this manner the celebrated criminal who was crucified with Jesus, did penance on the cross, and that having lived in sin, he died in grace. But I know, likewise, that, as St. Ambrose observes, those were the days of miraculous operations, when God was engaged to perform wonders in order to do honour to the death of his Son; that the Saviour of the world needed such prodigies to prove his divinity; and that this conversion, which hath passed in all ages of the Christian æra for a singular example, ought, for that same reason, far from comforting and encouraging sinners, to fill them, on the contrary, with

a holy fear. This is what I know, and this is what confirms me still more in the belief of this melancholy truth, that almost all sinners who postpone their repentance to the time of death, notwithstanding their repentance, "die in their sin."

If the question be asked, how this last mystery of reprobation is accomplished, and by what means an impenitent life leads to false repentance at the hour of death: I answer—and I earnestly conjure you to have it always in mind, being a material point, and of the utmost importance—I answer, and I say, that an impenitent life leads the sinners of this world to false repentance at the time of death, by way of delusion; and there is no one, I believe, but takes my meaning clearly. I shall explain it, however, and I say that the sinner unaccustomed as he is to the exercise of penance, and having never practised it during the course of life, is unskilled in the nature of it. Whence I conclude, that he is deceived at his death, and that by a natural consequence, he mistakes an imperfect and defective sorrow for true repentance. How should he judge rightly of what he never understood? And if he cannot judge rightly, how will he be able to avoid mistakes, especially in a matter so delicate as this; a matter, in which the most secret and internal motions of the soul must be nicely discerned? If this unfortunate man, in the course of life, had made any acts of repentance he would by little and little have formed some idea of it; and by dint of application, would have learned to distinguish between efficacious and inefficacious sorrow for sin. But he never made trial of it; and he is now on the point of breathing out his last without use or experience. Is it then surprising, that the enemy imposes on him? That his own sense misleads him? That he takes the figure for truth, and the shadow for the body? Is it surprising, that he fancies his desires of salvation to be saving effects, and the inspirations of heaven to be acts of contrition? Is it surprising, that, prepossessed by so fatal an error, penitent as he is to all appearance, in reality "he dies in his sin."

And now, Christians, it behoves you to deliberate, or rather, is there room for a moment's deliberation? Is not this the most just conclusion which can be drawn—that, in order to die a truly penitent death, you must prepare for it by leading a truly penitent life? To expect that all at once you will be complete masters of a difficult science in which delusions are so frequent, so subtle, and so dangerous, and to believe that your intended trial of skill will

be a masterpiece in its kind, is blind temerity. You will weep—but you will not be converted; you will sigh and moan in the presence of God—but you will not be converted; you will lift your hands up to heaven, you will stretch forth your arms and embrace the crucifix, the moving image of your dying Saviour—but you will not be converted. And why? Because, notwithstanding this specious outside and seeming grief, you retain your obduracy and a heart of stone; nor can I here refrain from making application of David's words: "Out of the midst of rocks thou shalt send forth voices." Ps. ciii. You will deceive, undesignedly, those who shall see you and those who shall hear you. You will deceive the priest, who will piously suppose that his care and attendance are well bestowed. You will deceive yourself—but you will not deceive God; and in quitting this world, you will find to your great disappointment and astonishment, not a God of mercy, but a God of justice. Seek the God of mercy all your life long—you will find him at your death, and enjoy him in glory to all eternity.

SERMON XXVIII.

ON THE LAST JUDGMENT.

For the second Sunday of Advent.

"*There shall be signs in the sun and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations . . . men withering away for fear and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world.*" LUKE xxi.

IT is from the completion, beloved Christians, of this prophecy, pronounced by our Saviour, that the destruction of the universe will commence; and it is by exhibiting these prodigies, that the Gospel represents in such lively colours a most astonishing revolution. There shall be signs in the heavens and on the earth: venerable signs, which Christ himself points out as the forerunner of his last coming; salutary signs, by which he would awaken and rouse our faith from the profound lethargy in which it is buried; formidable signs, which will not only dry men up with fear, but will shake the very powers of heaven.

All this (says St. Chrysostom) is undoubtedly true; and yet

these signs, these venerable, these salutary, these formidable signs will be only preparatives to a scene infinitely more worthy of our reflection, more essential to our salvation, and in itself more dreadful—which is the judgment of God. And it is of this judgment that I design to speak on the present occasion; a judgment of which the thoughts alone made the saints tremble; a judgment from which (to use the apostle's words) the righteous themselves shall scarce be saved; a judgment of which I undertake to demonstrate the equity and sanctity by showing on what ground will be founded its extreme and inevitable severity.

Give me, O Lord, your aid and the necessary grace to acquit myself properly in discussing so solid and important a subject. But give to my hearers, at the same time, the submission and docility which your word requires: your word to which I shall strictly adhere, and on which shall be hinged every proof that I shall adduce throughout this discourse: replenish me with your spirit, and let the great truth I have engaged to display make the impression it can and ought to make on their minds.

It is an article of faith that God, who is the sole, absolute, and sovereign Being, hath made all things for himself; and the same faith teaches us, that without derogating in any degree from the sovereignty of his Being, he hath likewise made all things for his chosen servants. Therefore (says St. Chrysostom, arguing on this subject), when God was determined to judge mankind at the end of ages, in the last resort he had two principal objects in view: one to do justice to himself, another to do justice to his elect. I shall pursue this inference, being a proper foundation for the important subject which I am going to handle, and of which I shall lay before you the order and disposition.

First: Almighty God, jealous of his glory, will judge the world to do justice to himself; and for that reason Jesus Christ, who as Son of God will preside at this judgment, will come with all the marks of power and majesty. Secondly: faithful to those who serve him faithfully, he will judge the world to do justice to his elect; and for that reason Jesus Christ spoke always of this judgment to his disciples and followers as of a thing that ought to antedate their comfort, by assuring them that it would be the day of their glory and salvation: "When these things shall begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads, because your redemption is at hand." Luke ii.

Adorable truths! which comprehend in few words whatever is most essential in the judgment of God. All the rest are no more than prognostics, which must, however, if we have but ever so little religion, be very terrible. But why do they appear so very terrible, and on what account are they so in fact? I have given already the two reasons: they will terminate in a judgment, which is the last act of justice that God will do to himself; and a judgment will succeed them which will be to the cost and shame of the reprobate, the most complete and shining act of justice that he will do to his elect. Otherwise, neither the darkness of the sun, nor the falling of the stars, nor all the other forerunning signs of the last judgment would be so very tremendous and ominous for the sinner. Otherwise, I should look, without disquietude, for this general revolution, which will precede the coming of the Son of Man. But to be unavoidably necessitated to undergo a judgment which will, to the confusion of the world, avenge God and the elect of God: ah! beloved hearers, this should be the constant object of our meditations as well as of our fears. Now these are the two great points of faith which the Gospel proposes respecting this subject. Endeavour all you can to comprehend them thoroughly. A judgment by which God will be avenged for the injustices of the world as fully and authentically as he ought to be. This is my plan, and I request that you favour me with particular attention.

Part I. As the world will be arrived to the summit of iniquity, and as mankind will have filled up the measure of their crimes, "The day of vengeance will come" (Jer. xlii); and God, who hitherto abounded in mercies, unable to put up with the horrible wickedness with which the whole earth will be overspread, will begin at length to exert his power. On this was founded by the royal prophet the propriety and necessity of a general judgment: "Arise, O Lord (says he), and judge thy own cause." Ps. lxxiii. He goes on: "Remember the reproaches with which the foolish man hath reproached thee." Two suggestions these of the Holy Ghost, by which it appears in what will consist the rigour of God's judgment—he will take vengeance for the outrages of mankind in general: "Arise, O Lord, and judge thy own cause;" and for those in particular of certain scandalous sinners, insolent in their impiety, and whose character it is to insult the Almighty with superior pride: "Remember the reproaches with which the foolish

man hath reproached thee." Let us draw from hence consequences worthy of our faith, good and practical consequences for the reformation of our lives.

1st. Almighty God will arise to judge his own cause. For, content in this life to dispense his favours, making the sun to shine equally on the wicked and the righteous, he leaves to those whom his providence hath vested with proper authority, the management of his cause, and the maintaining of his rights. To this end he hath established higher powers upon earth. "The prince (says St. Paul) is the minister of God, to execute wrath on him that doeth evil." Rom. xiii. As many sovereigns, magistrates, superiors, prelates and judges as are appointed to rule us, so many there are in whose hands are deposited the rights of God, and who are intrusted with the execution of the divine law. If his name be blasphemed or his worship profaned, as they are accountable to him, he strictly requires that they redress the abuse. Upon this account it is that he hath given to the priests of the new law so absolute a jurisdiction. The priests (says St. Chrysostom), in virtue of the power which they have of retaining or forgiving sins in the tribunal of penance, are the arbiters of the cause and most sacred rights of God, who, in granting them that power, told them to the letter and without restriction, "Judge between me and my vineyard" (Isai. v.); that is, judge between me and my people, between me and those sinners, who, prostrate at your feet, disclose their consciences and declare their offences. Oblige them to make me just and reasonable reparation, and impose, to that intent, proportional punishment—whatever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. But in judging this cause, remember that it is mine as well as theirs, and even more than theirs: "Judge between me and my vineyard."

For the same reason, whenever we meditate a reconciliation to God, he condescends in his infinite goodness that we be, though the adverse party, our own judges between him and ourselves. For, penance, as St. Augustin judiciously observes, considered relatively to the sinner only, is neither more nor less than an act of justice which he doth to God at his own cost. As if God should say—and that he hath said it is beyond dispute—render to me voluntary justice yourselves; wait not till I come to procure it in spite of you in the day of my wrath. Convinced by the dictates and testimony of your consciences, that you are culpable in my

sight, arm yourselves with zeal, condemn and punish yourselves, to the end that you may escape the terror of my judgment. This is the condition he proposes. Whence the apostle concluded without hesitation, that "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." 1 Cor. xxxi. Such in this life is God's method of proceeding: he giveth us permission to judge his cause and is willing to commit his concerns to our care.

But what is the consequence? Ah! beloved Christians, what we shall never be able sufficiently to deplore, and what we ought always to look upon as an undoubted foretoken of the rigour of God's judgment. This cause of God, entrusted to men, is, on account of their unfaithfulness, unworthily managed, feebly supported, shamefully abandoned, and basely betrayed. How many crimes, enormous crimes, are tolerated in the world through the negligence, the connivance, the corruption, and the prevarication of those whom God hath empowered and appointed to stop, by just and legal punishment, the torrent of iniquity? How many sacrileges, scandals, vices, sins the most monstrous and the most shameful, are overlooked and unrestrained, and the authors of which, to the disgrace of religion, walk the street barefacedly and without controul? How many wretches, noted for impiety, are gently dealt with, are respected and honoured, and in their impious deeds are seconded and applauded? And all this in contempt of the law, and of God himself. If a great man be but slightly offended, every spring is instantly set in motion to procure him satisfaction: the execution of justice can scarce be sufficiently speedy in repairing the injury he pretends to have received. But is an offence committed against the majesty of God? in a thousand conjunctures all is weak and languishing. Whatever obligation men may be under of using their endeavours to eradicate libertinism, when Almighty God only, or his cause is concerned they dissemble, they temporize, they mollify circumstances—and libertinism, notwithstanding the sanctity of the laws, gathers daily strength and obtains the ascendant.

Where, at this time, is that holy zeal for the cause of God which inflamed the breast of the royal psalmist, and should inflame the breast of every Christian who would approve himself worthy of the name he bears? On how many occasions is it made to give way to selfish policy, and is quite enervated by worldly motives? Shall I say it? Is not God's cause exposed in the very tribunal

of penance to a similar hazard? What abuses are committed in it? With what facility is absolution imparted to infamous livers and hardened sinners? How their persons are distinguished and their delicacy indulged! The severity of discipline which was heretofore exerted, did honour to God at the expense of the sinners; but now it would seem as if the whole design was to favour the sinner at the expense of God. As iniquity increases penance is mitigated: in comparison with those fervent ages when it was in full force, unfortunately it is now, and that by prescription, no more than the shadow of what it hath been. Scarce remain the traces of those venerable canons, which, for sins at this day too common in the world, enjoined whole years of rigorous satisfaction. God, notwithstanding, hath suffered no change, and his immutable prerogative subsists for ever. Let us impute, however, to none but ourselves this melancholy relaxation in the administration of penance. It is ourselves, Christians, let us own it to our sorrow, who, by our hardness of heart, compel, in some measure, the ministers of Christ to conduct themselves towards us with that condescension for which we shall be responsible more than they, and which cannot but end in our ruin and perdition. It is ourselves, who by artifices find out the means of slackening their zeal and corrupting their faithfulness. It is ourselves who induce them, against their will, to foment our disorders, and, of course, it is ourselves who are the chief prevaricators in the cause of God.

With this view it was, that the royal prophet besought the Almighty to take his own cause in hand: "Arise, O Lord, judge thy own cause." Ps. lxxiii. Hitherto you have approved yourself a forgiving God, "A God strong and patient." Ps. vii. As such, with amazing tranquillity, you have suffered those to betray you whose duty it was to vindicate your wrongs. Provide a remedy for so deplorable an abuse. Remember, O Lord, that you are engaged with rebels who turn against you your own divine attributes, taking your patience for indolence and your might for weakness. Arise, and let them see that, notwithstanding all your past forbearance, you know when to do yourself justice to the full. Now this, dear Christians, is what God will do at the last judgment; this he himself declares in these words, equally terrible and energetic: "When my hands shall take hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to mine enemies." Deut. xxxii. That is to say, when I shall take the power of judging, which is mine by right of sove-

reignty, into my own hands—when I shall deprive those of it who are used to turn it to evil purposes; when, tired with seeing it in wicked hands, I shall confine the privilege of exerting it to myself—"When my hand shall take hold on judgment"—then, says the Lord, will I resume my right; then shall my cause be victorious and shall triumph; then shall mine enemies feel the weight of that wrath which I have in store for them without mercy; "Then shall I render vengeance to mine enemies."

Hence it is, that the fatal day, pre-ordained for the summoning of mankind to judgment, is emphatically termed by two of the prophets "the day of the Lord." Zac. xiv. Mal. v. On that day, forgetful of others, he will act entirely for his own interests. All other days are, as I may call them, the days of men, for whose sakes alone the power, the goodness, and the zeal of God, appear to be exerted; but on this great, this tremendous day, he will be powerful, good, and zealous for himself only; and therefore he declares it to be his own day, "the day of the Lord."

"This is your hour," says our Saviour, addressing himself to those Jews who had conspired against him, "this is your hour, and the power of darkness." Luke xxii. In like manner, I say to the generality of mankind: these are your days, and, as you think, your best days, your days of happiness; days consecrated to diversions and pleasures; days, in which, inebriated with the good things of this life, your attention is taken up with the vain pursuits of fleeting enjoyments; days, in which, forgetful of whatever concerns your salvation, all your designs, and all your views have no other tendency than to gratify your ambition; days, which you pass away in idle amusements, vain contrivances, and needless intercourses. These are your days; and as you erroneously imagine that they were intended for you, instead of spending them in good works, and fulfilling your duty, you employ them entirely in works of darkness, and gratifying your desires: "This is your hour, and the power of darkness." But when that woful day shall come, in which these days of joy must terminate, as you have your time, God will have his; and the time of God is that which he will take to pass sentence on you. "When I shall take a time," says he, "I will judge justices." Ps. lxxiv. I will judge not only the injustice, but the false justice they have done me; not only their crimes, but their false penance; not only their sins, but their inefficacious contritions, their fruitless confessions, their unavailing

satisfactions. I will judge even judgments, those erroneous judgments with which the sinner is but too apt to deceive his conscience, to excuse his guilt, and to vindicate his conduct. "When I shall take a time, I will judge justices."

Moreover, Christians, to be in the last resort, and without appeal, plaintiff and judge in his own cause is peculiar to God. No earthly monarch, how absolute soever, can claim such power. If a difference arise between him and his subject, the decision depends on a free, disinterested, unsuspected verdict. Such is the constant practice of princes truly religious: and we have seen, to our comfort, recent instances of this kind that deserve our encomiums: and thus they imitate the King of kings.

For, says St. Chrysostom, God will judge his own cause, because by him alone it can be judged perfectly; because he alone is capable of discerning the immense injury done to him by sin; because none but himself can comprehend how far the malignant quality of sin reaches, and what are the punishments proportioned to it, the infinite dignity of his essence being the measure of the one and the other. As God, he will take vengeance for himself, because none but himself is thoroughly capable of taking vengeance; because none but himself hath the power of revenging him more than by halves; because his court is infinitely superior to all courts; He is the judge of judges, and only knows that complete vengeance which is due to his justice. He will take vengeance for himself, continues St. Chrysostom, because, in taking vengeance, himself only can act holily, laudably, and irreprehensibly. For this reason he said, "Vengeance appertaineth to me" (Rom. xii.); to me, who am capable not only to moderate it, but moreover to sanctify it; and not to man, who in no wise can practise it withouta crime. And truly, when man presumes to take vengeance he is transported with passion, he frets and chaffs, he gratifies his malice, he is violent and outrageous, he observes in his revenge no manner of proportion; to retort a slight injury he commits a great one, for which he applauds himself. It is fit therefore, that he be revenged by another, as he is too blind, and too unjust, to revenge himself properly; so that vengeance appertains to God alone. Holy vengeance, that will amend and reform the excess of ours! Adorable vengeance, the sole object of which will be to punish sin! Vengeance, which, formed in the heart of God, will equally with his sanctity, demand our respect. Not influenced, therefore, concludes

St. Chrysostom, by ostentation of authority, but by absolute necessity, he will at length "arise, and judge his own cause."

2nd. Let us now proceed further, and pursue the prophet's thought. "Remember," says he, "the reproaches with which the foolish man hath reproached thee." Let us examine in particular which are the outrages that God, when he shall come to judge the world, will remember to have received, and for which he will justly take vengeance of the impious and foolish man. They are written in the nineteenth and thirtieth Psalms. And here I must beg of you to redouble your attention. "Wherefore," says David, "hath the wicked man provoked God?" Psal. ix. Because these three things he hath said in his heart, injurious to God, in direct opposition to the light of reason, and contrary to the inward suggestions of his conscience, to which his impiety, in spite of his penetration, prevailed on his will to give full assent.

The foolish and impious man hath exasperated God, because "He said in his heart, there is no God" (Ps. xiii.); an affront to the Divinty which he will not acknowledge. He hath exasperated God, because he said in his heart, "God hath forgotten, he turned away his face not to see" (Ps. ix.); an affront to the divine providence which he calls in question, and to whose universal dominion he will not submit. He hath exasperated God, because "he said in his heart, he will not require it" (Ps. ix.); an affront to the divine justice, which he contemns and spurns at, and of which he endeavours to shake off the yoke. Exasperated at these three outrageous affronts, which he will not forget, Almighty God will discover to all mankind the greatness of his resentment. He will come to convince the impious man that there is a God, obliging him to acknowledge that this same God was ignorant of nothing, but knew all his thoughts, his most hidden practices and clandestine vices; and to confound him by showing himself an enemy to sin equally incapable of suffering the sinner to remain for ever unpunished as of changing his own essence, or of ceasing to be God. What are our thoughts if we think not perpetually of these important truths?

God Almighty, from a zeal for the justice he owes himself, will call back into the heart of the impious man that notion of the Deity which had long been effaced by intellectual blindness consequent on sin. Upon this account it is, that after having been a hidden God in the mystery of his incarnation, which is the mystery of his humility, he will shew himself to all men on that tremendous

judgment seat on which the Gospel represents him, with all the appearance of splendour and majesty; that he will be accompanied by the whole host of angels, and will call forth all nations to assemble before him; that fear and astonishment will seize, in his presence, the minds of men; and that the planets by their eclipses, and the elements by their confusion, will pay homage and adoration to his supreme power. And why will he come with such splendid attendance and with so much majesty? In order, says St. Chrysostom, to tell the real atheist, if such there be, or the atheist in conduct, with which the world abounds, what he hath told them already by the mouth of Moses, and what he then will repeat with more visible authenticity: "See ye that I alone am, and that there is no other God besides me." Deut. xxxii. Acknowledge at length that I am God, as on my side, in spite of you, the universe forms a general combination, and brands with infamy the extreme folly which made you call in question so palpable a truth. Acknowledge that I am your God, as, with all the haughtiness attending your libertinism, you could not avoid falling into my hands and undergoing the inflexible rigour of my judgment. Acknowledge that I alone am God, as all the princes and potentates of the earth, who have been idolized by the rest of mankind, are now vanished as smoke and are as nothing before me. "See ye that I alone am." Words of Deuteronomy, which will in the day of universal doom be verified to the letter, and will never be so affectingly convictive as then.

In this life the great (it is God himself that says it) are as gods of the earth: "I have said ye are gods." Ps. lxxxviii. And these gods of the earth are they, St. Chrysostom tells us, who obstruct the true knowledge of the God of heaven. Dazzled with the splendour of their own greatness they forget him whose image they are; and taken up only with the thoughts of themselves and their own concerns, are supinely neglectful of him who reigns over them. But at the general judgment, these gods of the earth, brought down upon a level with their fellow mortals, will be a demonstrative proof to the unbelieving libertine that there is a God superior to these supposed gods: "A God, the king of all the earth, that reigneth over the heathen, and sitteth upon the throne of his holiness" Ps. xlvi.; a God absolutely God, solely God, eternally God. "The Lord alone," says Isaias, "shall be exalted in that day." Isai. ii. Whatever is not God will be little, low, mean, and des-

picable; a mere atom, a mere nothing, before this sovereign Being. All human greatness will be humbled, all fortunes destroyed, all thrones overturned, all titles effaced, all ranks confounded—"The Lord alone shall be exalted."

This is not all: as the wicked man hath said, either God did not know, or hath not remembrance of, the evil I have done, God, to justify his providence, will show that nothing hath escaped his knowledge, and that he remembers all things. For this reason, on that great day of universal discovery, he will bring to light, and display to the view of all mankind what the wicked man imagines to be buried in oblivion. He will openly reveal to all the nations of the earth the baseness of the sinner, and the ignominy of his deeds: those shameful and mortifying sins; those sins, which at the moment he committed them, covered him with confusion; those sins, to have been suspected of which would have driven him to despair; those sins which he durst not lay open to the most trusty and discreet among all his friends; those sins, which would have blasted his reputation, which would have ruined his honour, and of which the reproach would have been more insupportable than death itself: God will make them known. No, no, will he say, I have not turned away my face from thy crimes. Horrible as they appeared, I wrote them down in indelible characters in the book of life and death which I this day produce. So many base actions, infamous dealings, mean artifices, ungenerous deceits, dark treacheries; so many abominations and so disorderly a life: "Are not these things stored up with me, and sealed up in my treasures?" Deut. xxxii. Now these are the treasures, the treasures of wrath which when he shall come to judge the world, God will display; and it is in this manner that he will take vengeance for the injustice which the sinner hath done him, by believing, or rather by affecting to believe that he was a blind God, a God without providence, a God like those idols that have eyes, but see not.

In fine, the senseless man hath said in his heart—whatever knowledge God may have of my crimes he will not call me to an account, he will not reprobate me eternally for so small a transgression. But God, beloved Christians, will screen his justice and holiness from so horrid a blasphemy. As how? By condemning the crimes of the impious man with the utmost rigour; by pardoning none—but punishing them without remission, as far as they are punishable; in a word, by making him feel the whole weight and force of that

judgment, of which the very thoughts fill the mind with horror, and to represent which in its full extent and full severity, is infinitely above the reach of all human knowledge. A judgment without mercy, which God will then exert against the worldling and libertine, who, to sin with impunity, had the insolence to form a religious system to their own minds, imagining God to be as they would have him, a condescending and indulgent God, a God to whom they should never be accountable: "For he said in his heart, he will not require." But this outrageously assuming pride he will particularly bear down, by pouring forth the torrent of his divine vengeance, and will vindicate the adorable attribute, his holiness: "For the Lord will require truth, and repay them abundantly that act proudly."

This, ye sinners, is what is most terrible in the judgment of God: He will take satisfaction for offences, and vengeance for contempt. This hath often made the most righteous to shudder, and hath riven the hearts of many godly Christians. But you, whatever your situation in life may be, though great sinners should not be disheartened, as you have still a great and infallible resource, and that is penance. Amiable penance, cries St. Bernard, by virtue of which I may infallibly prevent the judgment of God! And I say, Christians, happy penance, by which I may satisfy an offended Deity and appease his wrath! So that when he shall come to judge me hereafter, he will already be appeased and satisfied, and not necessitated to take revenge. Our penance, it is true, must not be devoid of its proper characteristics—it must be solid, exact, fervent, efficacious, and must bear proportion not only to the grievousness, but to the multiplicity of our sins: God, on no other terms, can be avenged or satisfied. And can we purchase our preservation from that direful judgment at too dear a rate? Can we complain that too much is required of us, in order to be reconciled to a God whom we have irritated? True it is, this God of glory will judge us according to the judgment we shall pronounce against ourselves at the tribunal of penance. If we spare ourselves, he will not spare us: but it follows, by a rule directly contrary, that God will spare me, if I do not spare myself; that he will pardon me, if I do not pardon myself; that if my penitential deeds be rigorous, his judgment will be favourable; in a word, that if I punish myself sufficiently, he will entirely forgive me. Now can more in reason be wished for to my advantage? Ah! Lord, I

should be unworthy of your mercy if the condition seemed hard; or, more properly, if I did not consider the most severe penance as the chief and most desirable happiness of my life; and I should be not only the most unjust, but the most senseless of mankind, if I expected by a dastardly, slight reparation, to escape the rigour and terror of your judgment.

Thus it is, sinners, that you ought to reason; and though some among you should be so vitiated, and so corrupt, and their impiety should rise to such a degree as not to allow the existence of a God, I could not refrain from addressing myself to them in this manner: hearken, my brethren, you whose salvation is dearer to me than my life, and for whose reformation and amendment I feel in my breast (if I may use the expression) a zeal wholly divine; you, for whose sakes, after the apostle's example, I could wish myself to be anathematized, hearken to-day to the voice of God, and harden not your hearts. This God, of whom you have been shamefully unmindful, hath innumerable graces for you still in store. As his arm is not shortened, he is ready to remit at your penitence and tears. Of this the great patience with which he hath borne with you to the present time is a convincing proof and certain pledge. Though sovereign judge, he still retains for you notwithstanding your errors all the tenderness and feelings of a loving father It is in great sinners and libertines like you, that he is wont to display the riches of his mercy. How scandalous soever your lives may have been—and who knows but he hath selected the most impious among you for that purpose—you may, to speak in the Scripture style, become vessels of election. Make advance towards him, and by an humble confession of the horrible blindness into which sin hath led you—though so great offenders—use the necessary means to find grace in his sight. The reformation of your lives will contribute to his glory, and to the edification of his church. It is of your concerns, my God, that I speak; nor am I afraid of overstraining the notions which I impart of your divine clemency, as it infinitely surpasses all the charity I have for them. And now, Christians, you have seen how God, at the end of time, will do justice to himself. It remains that I shew you what kind of justice he will render to his elect, which I proposed for the subject of the second part.

Part II. That God made all things for his chosen servants; and for them he created and preserves the world; that, but for

them, he would reduce it to its former state of nothingness; that all the designs of his providence turn upon them; and that in the order of nature, grace, and glory, every thing terminates in them, and is designed for them, is an incontestible truth, expressly declared in the inspired writings. It must be allowed, however, that this divine word, so advantageous to the elect, will not be accomplished before the great accounting day. And indeed, says St. Chrysostom, were there no life to come, and the Almighty never to judge mankind, it would be hard to comprehend what favour or privilege had been conferred on them; and far from imagining that God had created all things for them, we should often be rather inclined to think, that he seemed to have done nothing, or at least but little for them. In this life their appearance doth not distinguish them from other men; there is nothing that indicates a special care, or peculiar regard of divine providence for them. So far from it by a wonderful dispensation, which David acknowledges to have made him stagger and to have given him uneasiness in this life, the elect, who are the righteous, far from being known for what they are, are frequently cried down by the malignity of the world and confounded with hypocrites. In this life, the elect, who are the humble—far from being treated with honour and respect, are on many occasions despised and insulted. In this life the elect—who are the poor and needy—far from being relieved, are ever and anon rejected and abandoned. In this life, the elect—who are mostly the weak—far from being protected, are scandalously, and that not seldom, overwhelmed and oppressed. Now all this carries with it no semblance of that favour and affection which Almighty God, according to his promise, might be thought to have for them. It is very true, replies St. Chrysostom; but it is an irrefragable proof of the truth, the infallibility, the absolute and indispensible necessity of God's judgment. For, why will the Redeemer of mankind come, at the end of ages, and appear in quality of sovereign judge? To do justice to his elect on these four heads: he will come to revenge the righteous, by separating them from the hypocrites, and putting a period to the reign of hypocrisy—he will come to revenge the humble, by glorifying their humility and confounding the proud who used them contemptuously—he will come to revenge the poor, who by the hardheartedness of the rich, pine away in misery, but to whose sighs and tears it will manifestly appear he was not insensible—he

will come to revenge the weak, and take satisfaction for whatever either iniquity, or violence, or abuse of authority, made them suffer undeservedly. These, beloved hearers, are the principal reasons, relative to the predestinate, why the Scripture declares to us, that the Almighty Lord will appear in his vengeance. Listen, therefore, I pray, and as each of you in particular is deeply concerned, redouble your attention.

1st. He will come to revenge the righteous by separating them from the hypocrites, as the shepherd, says he himself in the Gospel, separates the sheep from the goats. For now all is indiscriminately confused, virtue and vice, innocence and crimes, truth and imposture, religion and hypocrisy; and in this confusion, the righteous suffer and the wicked triumph.

Let it, however, be remembered, that in speaking of hypocrisy I confine not my meaning to the particular species which consists only in an abuse of piety and a fallacious devotion. I speak of it in a more enlarged sense, the more conducive to your instruction, as you will be under a necessity perhaps of acknowledging that it is an odious vice, to which you are prone and much habituated. For I call hypocrisy whatever conceals, under specious appearances, the licentiousness and irregularities of a criminal life. Now it cannot be doubted that, in this sense, hypocrisy makes its way into all ranks, and that impostors and hypocrites are more general among those persons who are addicted to the world than those who are addicted to works of devotion. How many caitiffs wear the mask of honour! How many men of corrupt morals, and replete with iniquity, step forth with all the pride of self-approbation and ostentation of probity! How many cheats with effrontery and insolence boast of their sincerity! How many traitors assume the air of veracity and friendship! How many sensualists, slaves to the most vile and infamous passions, pretend to the strictest purity of manners, and even affect severity! How many prudes, though nice and punctilious concerning their reputation, are strongly engaged in shameful communications, but not wanting in address to procure esteem, and an opinion of exact and perfect regularity! On the other hand, how often are the righteous falsely accused and basely condemned! How often are the true servants of God, by the wickedness of the times, run down and calumniated! How often are upright, religious persons made the subject of laughter, sneers, and derision! How often is true virtue maliciously called

in question! How often are good works made to feel, undeservedly, the edge of censure and the sting of malevolence! How often are good intentions scandalously misconstrued, and holy actions made invidious by misrepresentation! Now all this, St. Chrysostom tells us, the judgment of God will one day reveal; insomuch that each one will hold his proper station, and will be known and will appear for what he is. Then the hidden secrets of the heart will be unfolded—then the inmost recesses of the conscience will be publicly manifested—then, says the apostle, "Every man shall have the praise that is due to him from God." 1 Cor. iv. By this fatal and decisive separation of the good grain from the tares, the deplorable but just sentence of the divine Spirit, pronounced against the hypocrite in the book of Job, will be accomplished to the letter: "The joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment . . . He shall be punished for all that he did . . . According to the multitude of his devices so also shall he suffer." Job xx.

The delight of the hypocrite was to deceive mankind, and be honoured and respected. It was his delight to obtain reputation in the world, which cost him no more than to play his part well to the end of the farce. It was his delight to receive, by dint of dissimulation, the homage and tribute due to real virtue, and to enjoy, without merit, the advantages of merit. This Job called the prosperity, the joy, and the reign of hypocrisy. But at the last judgment its reign will be destroyed, its prosperity will vanish, its joy will be converted into mortal afflictions. They were founded in the mistakes of unsuspecting men, imposed on and dazzled with false glitter. But this misleading of well-meaning persons hitherto deceived, but now disabused by a divine illumination after being a frivolous consolation to the hypocrite, will at last turn to his disgrace and confusion. He hoped that he should never be discovered to the bottom, and that the world would be a dupe to his hellish policy. But he feels on the contrary, all the pangs of despair, being incapable of disguise, having no darkness wherein to hide his head—seeing the veil drawn off, his artifices discovered and exposed to the eyes of all mankind. The hope of the hypocrite shall perish. Other sinners, known in the world for what they were, will have undergone, in part, the award which was consequent to their numerous offences. But the hypocrite who is compelled to pull off the mask, and discover how little he deserved the esteem for which he used to rate himself so high; the woman whose virtue was so greatly

celebrated, and whose private interviews are now made public; the magistrate who was thought an example of integrity, and whose injustices are made as visible as the meridian sun; the priest of sanctified reputation, with whose dissolute life God openly reproaches him; the man of supposed honour, who is found out for a cheat; the false friend, so much relied on, whose base treachery is indisputably made known; whoever had the art of hiding his iniquities, and is now under a necessity of sacrificing to truth: ah! Christians, for these it is that the judgment of God hath something in it inexpressibly melancholy—these it will drive to everlasting despair.

All this, however, for a reason quite opposite, will make it not supportable but favourable, nay honourable, nay desirable to the righteous and predestinate. For, says St. Chrysostom, their happiness will be that they appear what they are in the presence of every intellectual being; their happiness, and even the extent of their desires will be that the uprightness of their actions and the purity of their intentions are clearly discernible; their happiness will be that they are thoroughly known, as not to have been known was the original cause of all their disgrace. This, ye faithful souls, who, notwithstanding the corruptions and vices of the age, have served your God in spirit and in truth, this is what must, amidst the hardships of life, strengthen your resolution, and fill you with consolation. In that dreadful moment, when every conscience shall be disclosed to open view in its genuine state, your hope, enlivened at the sight of your supreme judge, and on the point of being completed, will strongly support you and fully indemnify you for the unjust persecutions raised against you by the world. While the perplexed, confounded, dispirited deist shall advance with downcast looks and trembling steps, you, because that will be the day of your justification, will appear with confidence and a secret joy. Now envy and calumny direct at you, unmolested, their envenomed shafts. But envy will be silenced, or, if she should speak, it will be in your favour; calumny will be refuted, and truth will shine forth in all her lustre and native beauty. Enjoy, nevertheless, the secret testimony of a good heart, a testimony preferable to all the praises of men. Say with St. Paul, it matters not what judgment men pass upon me at present, as I am to be one day judged by my gracious God: "For he that judged me is the Lord." 1 Cor. vii. Or say with Jeremias: "It is you, O Lord, who

fathom souls to the bottom, and find out with certainty the most secret windings and intricate mazes. To you I have laid open my cause." Jer. vii.

2nd. Let us proceed: He will come to glorify humility in the persons of the humble. That humility, that simplicity of the righteous, that patience in suffering undeserved injuries, which by worldly men is deemed weakness of mind, want of part and meanness of spirit, God will reward with a crown of glory, convincing the whole universe that it was true fortitude, true wisdom, true magnanimity. Then the humble of heart will arise with confidence, in opposition to those who had despised and insulted them. Then the wise ones of the world, freethinking unbelievers, will be astonished and confounded to see those very persons, whom they had used to look upon as the outcasts of men, placed on thrones of glory. Then, amazed and beside themselves, they will cry out with a sigh: "These are they whom we had sometimes in derision and for a parable of reproach: we fools esteemed their life madness and their end without honour. Behold how they are numbered among the children of God and their lot is witht he saints." Wisdom v. Then the world will bear this testimony, although by compulsion, to the humility and meekness of God's chosen servants; and the whole effect of our Lord's promise will be perceived clearly, and in a particular manner: "Every one that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Luke xiv.

It seldom happens, in the present life, that respect and honour are conferred proportionably to self-debasement. There are, whose humility, though real and solid, is attended to the end with mortifying circumstances. There are, who seek God in the spirit of religion, and who though buried, as it were, to the world and annihilated before men, yet die in obscurity. There are, whose solitary lives and hidden virtues are known only to God, and whose heroic efforts in breaking with the world receive no commendation; and, therefore, says St. Chrysostom, there ought to be and there will be a general audit at the end of time.

As the world is unjust to those perfect Christians who are objects of scorn for their master's sake, God, whose retribution is always abundant, will repay their forbearance a hundred fold. As there are saints upon earth, whose humility, though sincere, is neither known nor honoured in the degree it deserves, if the world were just, God, by making it blaze forth to the admiration of the

whole earth, will supply the deficiency. As the false honour, the ridiculous vanity, the presumptuous ambition of the world will be reprobated, homage will be paid to the holiness of the maxims which directed the wise and humble Christian through the labyrinths of life, because "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted, and he that exalteth himself shall be humbled." Luke xiv.

3rd. Further: He will come to comfort and bless the poor; for it is an article of faith that "The poor man shall not be forgotten to the end;" as likewise, that "The patience of the poor shall not perish for ever." Ps. ix. It is evident, however, that these two oracles of the Holy Spirit are not always, nay seldom are, verified in this life, as many of the poor are forgotten and unassisted. A forgetfulness the more deplorable, as it is mostly voluntary, and of course criminal, on the part of the rich. What vast numbers of wretched mortals are reduced by poverty to the utmost distress, the knowledge of which is studiously avoided? Had their want been known it would have extorted sentiments, if not of charity at least of humanity. Beholding their misery, the rich would blush at their own excesses, would be ashamed of their delicacy, would upbraid themselves with prodigality and preposterous high living, and would judge with reason such things to be criminal in the presence of God. But as they know not how much these chosen members of Christ endure—as their ignorance is voluntary—as they are afraid to be informed—as they banish them from their presence, they think themselves, by forgetting them, free from all obligation; and to whatever extremity the poor may be reduced, they have no bowels of compassion for them. How many are rejected without examination, on pretence that they counterfeit a state of indigence! How many are there whose sighs and lamentations are too weak to reach the ears of those who are possessed of the means to relieve their necessity! How many are afflicted in noisome prisons or pine away in hospitals, or feel the scourge of famine in their own families! and of those whose poverty is evidently known, and whose miserable condition cannot be forgotten, how many are neglected! How many are browbeaten or trodden under foot! How many faithful servants of God want common necessaries, while the servants of mammon wallow in abundance, in luxury, in delicacies! Were there no last judgment, these sufferings of the poor, aggravated by the insensibility and hardheartedness of the rich, might be termed with propriety a partiality of

Providence. But, for that same reason, as St. Chrysostom observes, Providence hath preordained a severe and rigorous judgment of the rich, and this David comprehended perfectly when he said: "I know that the Lord will do justice to the needy and will revenge the poor." Ps. cxxxix. And how doth he know it? By this argument—that as the patience of the poor neither could nor ought to be overlooked for ever, a judgment was necessary, a judgment superior to that of men, whereby it will appear that it was not overlooked. That is, God values and esteems it, as much as it is just a sovereign and equitable master ought to do: "The patience of the poor shall not perish for ever. Ps. ix. A judgment by which the poor will be indemnified for the unequal distribution of emoluments which reduced them to penury and overwhelmed them with hardships, but by which their patience, put to the utmost stretch, will be fully compensated for the unjust treatment it shall have undergone. Upon this account, says the Lord himself, I will rise; the sufferings of the poor, against whom the pitiless rich steeled their hearts, have inflamed my wrath; their cries and lamentations have reached my throne; I am exasperated to find that their complaints are ineffectual, and make no impression: "By reason of the misery of the needy and the groans of the poor now will I arise, saith the Lord." Ps. cxi. Their tears are so many pressing solicitations to me in their favour; nor shall I think I have rendered them that justice which I owe them, both as creator and as judge till that great day when I shall pronounce a decree of salvation for them, at the same time that I shall condemn without mercy those who shall have shown no mercy to them. To hear Almighty God thus speak in the Scriptures, would not one imagine that his main intent, by a general judgment, was to give satisfaction to the poor, and that his chief view was to do them justice? "By reason of the misery of the needy and the groans of the poor." To see how the Son of God, who is to preside there, will demean himself and act, would not one imagine that the care of the poor was the point on which the whole judgment of the universe turned? That the destiny of men absolutely and essentially depended thereon: that is, some will be condemned only for having despised the poor, and others crowned with glory for having afforded them relief? Wherefore the royal prophet concludes: "Blessed is the man that understandeth concerning the needy and the poor." And why? "Because the Lord will deliver him in the evil day." Ps. xl.

4th. To conclude: He will come to relieve the weak and helpless who had long groaned under the cruel oppression of lawless power; for now it is interest that chiefly prevails, and that on most occasions hath the upper hand. The most powerful man, whatever he undertakes, is always in the right; and, because the most powerful, thinks his undertaking just and obtains his end. How many persecutions and vexations proceed daily from the abuse of authority! How many poor wretches, how many widows, for want of support, are sacrificed like victims to the rapacity of favourites! How many estates of unprotected wards, after numerous formalities, are made a scandalous prey to the collusion of guardians and chicanery of lawyers! How many families, destitute of protection and subverted by sway, are fallen to ruin! How many lawsuits are unjustly terminated by solicitation, cabal, and the prevalence of party! Notwithstanding the justness of the laws and the vigilance of the legislature, it is almost certain that the weak must yield. If corruption makes its way to the judge's heart the moneyless plaintiff, not the rich defendant, is sure to be cast and to suffer wrong. From the moment he loses his power and authority, through an untoward fatality, he is crossed on all sides. But what was refused him at an earthly bar he will find at last, to his comfort, in the Lord. The Almighty Lord, full of equity and zeal, will defend the orphan, that the powerful and the great may no longer boast of their power and their greatness. He will "Judge for the fatherless and the humble, that man may no more presume to magnify himself upon earth" (Ps. ix.); the man who hath hitherto, as his power was irresistible, had the upper hand, and been the subject of admiration for the extensiveness of his capacity and the justness of his claim to distinction and honours. He hath gloried in and made a merit of his very violence. But the Lord will undeceive him in that great day; and by avenging and protecting, and withdrawing from oppression the weak and distressed, will bring down his spirit and convince him of his vanity, "that he may no more presume to magnify himself."

It is true then to say, that the day of God's judgment will be for the elect, a day of redemptiod, a day of glory, a day in which the Almighty will do them entire justice. Ah! Christians, what are our thoughts if thoroughly convinced of so affecting a truth, we do not exert all the powers of our soul, in order to be of that happy number? What are our deeds, if, renouncing the delusive max-

ims of the world, we do not endeavour to be in a condition of appearing before the bar of Christ? Now here, beloved hearers, is the important secret which I would impart to you, as the fruit to be gathered from this whole discourse. Begin to do now, in your own regard, what the great judge will do at the last day in regard to his elect. He will separate them from hypocrites and impious men: separate yourselves now from them by the practice of solid and true piety. He will glorify the humble: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in the day of his visitation." 1 Pet. v. He will bless the poor: now assist and comfort them to the utmost of your power. Procure their intercession at God's tribunal, that they may conduct you at length into the eternal tabernacles. He will avenge the weak and oppressed; protect them, and according to the measure of your ability, be guardians, after God's example, to the fatherless and the widow. And you, righteous, humble, poor, defenceless, the beloved of God, in your righteousness, in your obscurity, in your poverty, in your weakness, bear up in expectation of that great day which will be at once, the Lord's and yours. Not but that all should fear God's judgment: yet fear it so, that it be the subject of your desire, of your love, and of your hope. And why should you not love that which will deliver you from the miseries and vexations of the present life? Why should you not desire that which will rescue you from the slavery of the world? Why should you not hope for that which will introduce you into everlasting happiness? Fear the judgment of God; but let your fear be blended with love and confidence: fear it as you fear God. It is not allowable to fear God without loving him; love must accompany, nay, outgo your fear; else your fear is but servile, and insufficient for salvation. Now may not the same be reasonably said with respect to God's judgment? Let us all fear, beloved hearers, this dreadful judgment; but let our fear be efficacious; a fear that will reform us—that will restrain our irregularities—that will redouble our vigilance—that will kindle our fervour—that will impel us to the practice of all Christian good works. Thus shall we deserve to be placed at the right hand, and to hear from the mouth of our sovereign judge these comfortable words: "Come, ye blessed of my father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Matt. xxv.

SERMON XXIX.

ON THE PAINS OF HELL.

"*The rich man also died, and was buried in hell.*" LUKE xvi.

THIS is the end, beloved Christians, the melancholy fate of a rich man. His fortune was affluent, he wallowed in all the good things of this life, and was loaded with honours even after death: for, it may be supposed that his funeral obsequies were very magnificent, that his corpse was carried in pomp and ceremony, and that a superb monument was erected to his memory; and, in all probability (though a public sinner), there was not wanting panegyrists who publicly spoke his praises, blazoned his achievements, and ascribed to him the glory of the greatest virtues. But his misfortune—his extreme misfortune was, that while honours were paid him in this world, he groaned under the lash of justice in the other; and that his soul being brought before God's tribunal received sentence of death and everlasting sufferings, and was instantly buried in the pit of hell. A frightful image this of what happens but too frequently to the rich ones and great ones of this world: "The rich man died, and was buried in hell."

I would to God, beloved Christians, that, endeavouring to set forth the horrible effects of this eternal damnation, I may have the happiness to make you conceive a horror of it, and induce you to avoid it! To preach at court, upon hell, is a duty annexed to the Gospel-ministry; and God forbid that a false prudence, or a timid and unbecoming compliance with the depraved taste of his audience, should induce the preacher to pass over unheeded so essential a subject—one of the fundamental points of religion. He should reflect, however, in whose presence he speaks, and to whom he announces it. To the vulgar this doctrine might justly be explained by sensible figures—lakes of brimstone, fiery gulfs, hideous spectres, gnashing of teeth. But to you, beloved hearers, who, though worldly and carnal, are the wise ones of the world in another sense, to you it must be explained in the simplicity of faith, in a manner to convey to you an exact knowledge of it, in a manner calculated to give you edification.

God heretofore put this question to Job: "Have the gates of death been opened unto thee, or hast thou beheld the darksome doors?" Job. xxxviii. It is not improbable that this holy man, however clear-sighted, was unable to give an answer to this interrogatory: for the Scriptures inform us, that none but Jesus Christ was to have opened the gates of hell and of death; and accordingly he tells us himself in the Apocalypse, that "he hath in his hand the keys of hell and of death." Apoc. i. But now that he hath brought us these mysterious keys; that he hath opened to us the gates of those gloomy regions; and that he hath revealed to us by the divine oracles of the Gospel what passes in the dark abodes of the damned, it depends upon ourselves to have a thorough knowledge of them. If, therefore, God should ask us this question: "Have the gates of death been opened unto you, or have you beheld the darksome doors?" Have you seen the abyss in which the wicked are shut up, and in which they suffer all the rigours of my vengeance? We should be much to blame did we not make answer: Yes, O Lord, I have seen it, I have considered it, I have made it the subject of my serious reflections, and I have drawn from it the mental illumination requisite for the conduct of my life. And this, beloved hearers, is what I mean this day to place before your eyes for the edification of your souls. I mean to let you see what hell is, of what its torments consist, and the essential properties of infernal pains. And as this subject is copious to infinity, I shall confine myself to the reflection of Pope Innocent the Third, in his excellent treatise "On contempt of the World," where he says that the damned suffer three different ways; namely, by remembrance of the past, by present sufferings, and by despair of obtaining God's grace in future. To come, therefore, to the division of your present instruction: the situation of the damned is unhappy for the three following reasons. First, they are racked by the remembrance of the past. Secondly, their present sufferings overpower them with anguish. Thirdly, the prospect of futurity throws them into despair.

Part I. The first sufferings of the damned will be the remembrance of the past; a remembrance that will torment them sharply, that will torment them eternally, that will torment them without interruption or diminution, that will torment them in every manner of way that the justice of God, in conjunction with his omnipotence, decrees to inflict; but what is still more deplorable, that

it will have no other effect in tormenting them, than to make them undergo punishment, and to torment them. This, Christians, is the primary notion which I conceive of the state of the damned in hell, and of their reprobation. "Son (says Abraham to the rich glutton), remember that in thy life-time thou receivest thy good things" (Luke xvi.); but call to mind, at the same time, the ill use thou madest of them. Two afflicting considerations these, St. Chrysostom tells us, for a damned soul; one, on the good things of which he made an ill use; the other on the wicked deeds which he perpetrated. Both the one and the other, according to the intention of Christ our Lord, are necessary in order to restrain the impetuosity of our passions, and make us steady in the ways of Christian wisdom.

1st. The first thing that will torment the reprobated sinner, will be the remembrance of the good things which he once possessed, and in which he placed all the happiness of life, but which, by a melancholy reversion, will rack him, and harrow up his heart with the deepest sorrow. Not for having lost them; for how great soever had been his attachment to them, he is no longer capable of being affected with them, and is but too well convinced of their vanity and futility; but for having loved them preferably to his eternal salvation; for having turned them to purposes dishonourable to the Deity; for having employed them to his own everlasting destruction. Ah! will the rich man say, torn with the most cruel and lively repentance, for these are the perpetual plaints of the damned, according to the Scripture: if I had disposed of my fortune after the will of God; if, conformably to the laws and spirit of Christianity, and to the obligations of my state, I had assisted the poor; if, influenced by a religious and charitable zeal, I had divided it between Jesus Christ and myself; if, looking on it as a talent, of which I was entrusted with the disposal only, I had applied it to the works of mercy and piety; if, like a faithful steward, I had made the profits arising from it subservient to the honour and glory of the master who committed it to my care, what death hath deprived me of, would be for me at this present a treasure of merit, and a store of happiness to all eternity. I should merit the praises of men on earth, and receive in heaven the reward of God. But because an insatiable desire of accumulating and enjoying wealth made me unmercifully withhold it, notwithstanding their distresses, from the needy and the poor; because an

immoderate luxury, regulated only by the spirit of the world, made me squander it in idle and superfluous expences; because a shameful attention to gratify the senses made me lavish it in excess and criminal intemperance; because a detestable ambition to rise in the world, or a blind passion to enrich my children—libertine, and perhaps ungrateful heirs—made me seek it against all the laws of justice and at the expense of my conscience; this same fortune, in which I place all my hope and felicity, must be my tormentor.

A thought the most afflicting, as making forthwith a most melancholy comparison, he will form to himself an idea of the supreme and eternal good, which he hath lost for perishable and fleeting enjoyments. This plain conviction which will never quit him, but will always be distinctly present to his mind, that he hath lost his true happiness, his only happiness, for a false happiness, false even in the opinion of mankind, a frivolous lucre that blinded him, an imaginary honour that infatuated him, a brutal pleasure to which he abandoned himself; the grevious vexation, which, upon this account, he will conceive against himself, and which will make him say with much more reason than the son of Saul: "I did but taste a little honey, and lo I die" (1 Kings xiv.), a few pleasures which my reason condemned, and of which the stings of my conscience destroyed almost all the relish—and now I am condemned to drink the cup of divine wrath, a cup of gall and bitterness, filled up in the day of the Lord's anger, which he keeps for his enemies: all this, I say, will create in his soul an internal worm, which will gnaw him for evew, but never devour him. "Son remember that in thy life time thou receives thy good things." Thus we use the gifts of God against God himself; but God in his turn, will use them against us. And St. Gregory tells us, that as we make them the instruments of our wickedness to offend him, he will make them the instruments of his justice to punish us, and that by thought and remembrance.

But if the ill use of natural gifts, and earthly things, will make so violent and deep an impression on the soul of the sinner, how great an impression will the ill use of graces and supernatural gifts make, which, considered as they regarded the service of God, and relatively to damnation, will be attended with consequences much more deplorable? What words can express the affliction of one everlastingly reprobated, when he shall attentively recollect (and he will attentively recollect it to all eternity) how often he turned the

means of salvation and special assistance to no purpose? How often he extinguished supernatural lights? How often he rejected divine inspirations? How often neglected, or profaned the sacraments? How often he hardened his heart against the influence of holy instructions? How often he overlooked good example, through an affected disbelief of a revealed will, upon which he valued himself, or from a natural sluggishness and criminal delicacy, which he never sufficiently tried to overcome? Alas! had I faithfully corresponded with the graces which God bestowed upon me: had I renounced the slavery of the world and the flesh, to follow the voice which called me, and called me so often and so pressingly, I should have been robed with sanctity, I should have shared in the inheritance of the children of God, I should have possessed the kingdom which they possess; but, because I turned those precious favours to no account, because I ungratefully made no return for them, because I held them in contempt, because I even resisted them, and by my obstinacy hindered them from bringing me to God and working my conversion, they rise up against me, make me feel the stripes of unremitting persecution, and take vengeance for God. Instead of those salutary and quickening contritions which they ought to have occasionally stirred up in my heart, they cause remorses that rack, sadness that overwhelms, repentance that pierces, that transports, that rises into fury, into rage.

2nd. Now as God will make use of his very graces to torment the sinner, you may imagine how much the sinner will suffer from the remembrance and sight of his criminal deeds, of which the most natural property is, to become the punishment of those who committed them. No, says St. Chrysostom, there need no devils, no spectres, to make hell a scene of torments. The devils to which each one will be delivered up, will be his own crimes which he brought with him thither. His abominable impurities, his enormous injustices, his profanation of holy things, his avowed contempt of the Supreme Being, his rancours and animosities, his deceits and treacheries, his hypocritical artifices, his scandalous atheism, his sallies of anger and his vindictive designs, his refined obloquy, his dark designing, insidious calumny, so many other iniquities, to number up which is beyond my power, will invest him, will besiege him, will seize him with the most lively, with inexpressible terror.

Nor is it absolutely necessary to call Christian faith in aid of

this belief, since the pagans themselves have believed the same thing, and have many times made it the subject of their fables. Now what we call their fables, as St. Augustin remarks, were at bottom the most sublime mysteries of their theology, and the best established principles of their ethics. They proposed them to the people under the veil of fiction, but which included the same doctrine that we are taught by faith: and notwithstanding the licentiousness of unbelievers who live among us, these infidels give us a strong testimony, conformable to that of the prophets and apostles: namely, that there is a hell, and that one of the greatest punishments of this hell will be, to have committed sin, and to have been defiled with crimes in the course of life.

But these crimes will exist no longer. True, replies St. Bernard, they will exist no longer in the reality of their being, but they will still exist in thought and remembrance. Now it is in remembrance and thought that the soul reprobated by God will suffer. They will exist no longer, says this holy father, but they will have had existence; neither will it be in the power of the sinner or of any other to hinder them from having had existence. Now they will not torment, either in hell or upon earth, but because they had existed: and therefore they torment when their existence ceases; or, rather, they do not begin to torment before the ceasing of their existence. And as not to be, and to have been, are two infinite terms, terms which will equal the eternity of God, and will subsist, according to their manner of subsisting, while God is God, those crimes which have been, and which are no more, will have, if I may venture the expression, an eternal activity in hell to torment the damned soul. They contented him but a moment, the moment he committed them: they will torment him eternally, when he will not commit them. St. Augustin gives the reason for it, and a good one it is, because, says he, every thing acts in proportion to the extent of its duration. Now the present which affords the whole pleasure of the sinner, how long is it so? An instant and no more: and upon this account it is, that he relished it so little: whereas the past, which will always torment him, will be always past, and, as past, having no end, of indispensable necessity must always be felt.

This, says St. Bernard, is what every day happens to weak souls, when, through the unfortunate weakness of human nature, they forget God and themselves too. Suppose a person of the

other sex, tenacious of her honour, and scrupulously nice in all her duties, but whom frequent temptations of opportunity and importunity make yield at last. What repentance! what grief! what shame of her weakness! what horror of her crime! She would cancel it at the expense of a thousand lives; and were the matter again to be brought under deliberation, there is no sort of death to which she would not submit, rather than give so criminal and shameful a consent. But there is no remedy; and it will always be true, that she abandoned herself to the infamy and disgrace of sin. It is this that produces, and that feeds the bitterness which fills her soul, and which usually abides by her to her dying moment. Observe what happens to a choleric man, when in the heat of passion he imbrues his hands in his neighbour's blood. Scarce hath he given him his death wound, but he is disturbed in mind and disordered in his senses. His peace is flown, snd his reason almost lost. What would he not do, what would he not give, what would he not suffer, to have it still in his power to perpetrate that which he now hath perpetrated, but which he will never be able to repair? Now this is but a figure and shadow of hell. Inasmuch as to have sinned implies something eternal, the torment by a just, though dreadful, sentence, will also be eternal; and the soul will be unhappy without end or intermission, that it was a moment culpable. Whoever should be affected with this thought, in what a light would he view the enormity of sin and what pains would he not take to guard against it?

Further: all the crimes and disorders of their life will appear together before the eyes of the damned, and will torment them together. They committed them only one after another, and at certain intervals; one day, one; another day, another. Whatever satisfaction, therefore, they drew from them, it was only piecemeal. But in their torment there will be neither succession nor division: God Almighty will collect it all together at every instant; and all those crimes, which, considered as present, are widely diffused through a series of days, of months, and of years, will unite in the past, because it will be true, at the same time, to say that they are past. Thus they will all, by an invisible virtue, concur to the melancholy purpose of damnation. You may, therefore, imagine what altogether will do, since one of them is itself a hell.

Alas! Christians, be not disgusted with a supposition I shall make. I doubt it will hurt the delicacy of your minds. I would

to God it may inspire you, by that very means, with a holy horror of the corruption of your hearts! Should a miry, stagnant water be stirred up, and you should be compelled perpetually to behold its filth, it would be a deadly, grevious, punishment for you, a martyrdom equally rigorous and humiliating. Now such, and still much more insupportable will the sufferings be which are stored in hell, in order to punish, for instance, a sensual and unchaste man. God will make him see, with the cast of an eye, the most obscene objects, and foulest ideas that the lusts of the flesh created in him: secret consents, criminal desires, hopes entertained, opportunities sought after, scandalous communications, lacivious conversations, freedoms, looks, dissoluteness, effeminacy, all this and more he will place before him; and, tying him down to this one object. Behold, will he say every moment of eternity, these are the lasting fruits of thy incontinence—these the productions of thy corrupted heart.

What is is possible to conceive more intolerable than this monstrous heap of impurities? You may form a judgment of it by what we experience from a more general and exact review of our consciences. What shame do we feel, when, all at once, that innumerable multitude of sins is laid open before our eyes? But if this shame, wholly supernatural and divine as it is; if, even when it arises from divine grace, even when it occasions our reconciliation with God, it is yet painful to us, so painful that we studiously endeavour to avoid it, what words can express the shame of the damned, or their sentiments touching their wretched situation? Ah! my Lord, cries holy David, in the fervour of his penitence, I can live no longer, I am out of my mind, when I view my iniquities, and perceive them multiplied to an infinite degree: "There is no peace in my bones, because of my sins." Ps. xxxvii. He was a king, my brethren, a king in prosperity, a great king, raised up to the zenith of human falicy. Nevertheless, he was disturbed, affected, thunderstruck, at the sight of that frightful scene which discovered to him his misdeeds and relapses. Hence we may infer what will be the condition of those souls, who, snatched from the earth, and excluded, too, from the mansions of bliss, shall be totally absorbed in the remembrance of their sin; shall uninterruptedly have this thought—I have sinned; shall say to themselves incessantly—I have sinned; shall think of it, and shall express it, without ever being able to destroy this sin, which

they will hate, will abhor, as the irremediable source of all our woes.

This, dear Christians, is a lesson for us. The rich glutton was desirous that his brethren upon earth should profit by his example, but God would not have it so. Perhaps they had rendered themselves unworthy of that favour. Probably one of the greatest chastisements which God inflicted on them was, to debar them from the knowledge of the calamitous situation of their brother in hell. But what God would not grant them he now grants us: he would have us take warning by this damned soul; would have us learn prudence, as I may say, by his folly; and would have the regret which he feels for the past be of use to us in reforming the present and the future. True it is, God sends us neither Lazarus nor any of the dead for that purpose, because he hath given us his sacred words written in the Gospel and declared by his ministers, that will be more convincing and infallible to us, than the report which Lazarus and all the rest of the dead might make.

We fancy sometimes that the dead raised to life, and the words of a soul returned from hell would have great weight with us, and, in order to conversion, would make an impression sufficiently deep on our minds. But this, Christians, is a mistaken notion: and since we do not give ear to Moses or the prophets, that is to the words of Christ Jesus or his preachers, we still should find numberless reasons to call in question and reject such testimony. Nor should it be forgotten that the providence of God is not wont to make use of extraordinary means, while ordinary and sufficient means may be found. For this reason, as St. Augustine remarks, God never wrought a miracle to refute the doctrine of atheism, which is sufficiently refuted by the universal voice of nature. Accordingly, he is contented to give us for instruction the example of the rich man doomed to reprobation. But we, beloved hearers, (mind, I beseech you, this observation) far from being advantaged by this example, are not advantaged by our own experience. For in the present life we plainly experience the repentance of the damned, by the trouble and remorse of sins committed. Trouble, remorse—at once the image and pain of hell. For what is that remorse, that shame which we conceive, that self-condemnation against our will, that heart-felt sorrow when condemned by others? What is all this but a voice that secretly whispers—there is a hell? a hell which we carry in some sort within us?

But here, beloved hearers, lies the inordination. In order to be able to sin the more freely and with greater impunity, we by little and little get rid of this anticipated, and, if I may so call it, temporal hell, which worries our consciences, and which yet might be salutary for us, by preserving us from the eternal hell. That is, we stifle the remorse which, according to St. Chrysostom, is the last grace in the order of salvation and predestination. And because this remorse is inseparable from the idea of a God, of a providence, of an immortal life—I mean because it is impossible to believe a God, a providence, an immortal life, and not feel this remorse—to free ourselves from it we try to set a traverse between us and these capital points of religion; at least we endeavour to call them in question, and not to believe them but by halves. We cannot find peace in sin without coming to that pass. But let us make what efforts soever we please, let us reason and dispute as much as we will, the worm of sin will not die notwithstanding that; nor shall we ever have the advantage of being totally delivered from it even in the present life. At certain times it will return unexpectedly, and gnaw us afresh in the midst of our pleasures at the moment seemingly devoted to joy. Millions of others more hardened in wickedness, and more impious than you are, have, thousands of times, and by daily experience found this to be true. What do I say, not even the princes and potentates of the earth can tear it from their breasts. Against everything else they are able to defend themselves—but against themselves they cannot defend themselves.

How deplorable, my brethren, is the case of a sinner, since whether in the state of reprobation after death, or in the way that leads to it in the course of life, he cannot help finding the guilt of his conscience an inevitable hell to him! But what is the remedy? It is, as I have said, to take advantage from the present remorse of sin, of which the rich glutton can no longer make use; for if we please, our conversion depends upon this remorse. Therefore, Christians, in supposition that I am faithful to the impulse of grace, what is my practice? Instead of smothering the remorse of sin I awaken it, on the contrary, and stir it up by frequent and solid reflections. That which the damned will eternally do of rigorous necessity—by always considering, in spite of them, the dreadful consequences of sin—the same I do, influenced by a wise and Christian precaution. In the bitterness of my soul I ponder every day

of my life before God, like the pious Ezechias, upon the number of my years. I say to him, ah! Lord, if my sin be at present so painful to me, what must it be in hell? Not satisfied with this, I beseech him to grant me those inward stings as one of the most particular favours he grants his chosen servants when passion hath plunged them into the gulf of sin. I beg of him to reprove me, not in anger but in the spirit of his mercy, which is not only the comforter but the censurer of the world, and which, as censurer, is its reformer: "He will reprove the world of sin." John xvi. I proceed still farther—I antedate these stings—I reason with myself, and put myself the question—what good will accrue to me from this sin? shall I be pleased, when I have committed it, with what I have done? What shall I get by it but remorse and shame? Why should I do now what I then would wish to have never done? Thus it is that my mind is improved, and that I am encouraged to make head against all the temptations of the world and the flesh, to resist manfully on dangerous occasions and at critical moments; to spare no labour or pains in fencing against that dreadful damnation in which the damned not only are pierced with the most deadly sorrow for the past, but undergo the most excruciating punishment at the present, which I have proposed for the subject of the second part.

PART. II.—There was nothing St. Bernard more ardently wished, explaining these words of the royal psalmist, "Let them go down living into hell" (Ps. liv.), than that sinners would descend in thought into hell; not doubting that the sight of that frightful abode, and of the torments undergone there would make a lively and lasting impression on their hearts; and convinced that the most certain means of escaping it after death would be to go down there frequently in one's lifetime by the power of imagination. But, Christians, it were necessary, for the perfectly accomplishing of St. Bernard's wish, that we should descend with the same knowledge as the damned, and, if possible, with the same experience, to the end we might form the same judgment that they do, and draw consequences to them henceforth unavailing, but which might be to us of the utmost utility. For, to descend mentally into the regions of the damned with an understanding so weak, an imagination so dissipated, and, above all, an insensibility to the things of heaven so prodigious as ours, is to do almost fruitlessly what St.

Bernard proposed as one of the most efficacious remedies for reclaiming us from our evil ways and reforming our conduct.

Alas! says St. Augustin, who can now comprehend what the damned comprehend? Who can form to himself, in the depth of meditation, the ideas which they form in the midst of flames? Let us endeavour to form them, beloved Christians; and since it is not enough to go down intellectually into the place of woes, let us enter, for we may, into the sentiments of the damned; let us substitute their experimental knowledge to our own; and let us sincerely acknowledge how "horrible it is to fall into the hands of the living God." What do those miserable wretches do, or what is their conditions? They see themselves separated from the God of heaven, and surrounded with fire to which they are made victims—a double punishment, two kinds of suffering, both of which are perfectly exemplified by our Saviour in the case of the rich glutton. They see themselves separated from the God of heaven: this is the essential, and as it were fundamental part of their reprobation. "He lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and beheld Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom." Luke xvi. He espied the holy patriarch "afar off," at an infinite distance, and that was what afflicted him. He saw himself separated from him by a great gulf, that is, by a vast remoteness, insomuch that no communication could be held between him and Abraham: "Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed." Luke xvi. If then he perceived himself, as St. Ambrose observes, so distant from Abraham, how great must he have perceived the distance to be between him and God? And this separation was a punishment still infinitely more grievous for him.

1st. For, what is it, Christians, to be separated from God? Alas! who can comprehend so dreadfully significant an interrogatory? Separated from God—that is, absolutely deprived of God. Separated from God—that is, condemned to have God only as an enemy; an avenging God. Separated from God—that is, having forfeited the possession of the first of all beings, the most excellent of all beings, the Supreme Being—which is God. A punishment, says St. Bernard, which cannot be measured but by the infinitude of God; a punishment, which is the privation even of God; a punishment, which of consequence must be great proportionably to the greatness of God. Thus, as God said to the righteous man, "I will be thy reward exceeding great" (Gen. xv.), by giving my-

self to thee, because I have nothing greater or better than myself to give thee; he may also say to the reprobated sinner: it is myself will be thy punishment, by banishing thee from me, for I have nothing more formidable in the treasures of my wrath, than this banishment, this eternal separation from myself.

And indeed, Christians, will not this thought, this galling reflection, "no more communication between God and me," which the reprobated sinner will always have in mind, be a complete hell to him? Now this will be verified, this will be accomplished in every creature whom God shall reprobate. The moment he shall pronounce this dreadful sentence, "Begone, thou accursed!" he will divest himself, as it were, of his power over the wretched soul (that only excepted which the necessity of his dominion will not suffer him to alienate), and the wretched soul will become not only unworthy to possess him, but even to belong to him. God will repudiate her for ever; and this divorce will be the consummation of her wo. This dreadful case, this loss of a God commences even in this life in the persons of sinners. God and the soul are separated by sin, and to that degree that they renounce one another. The Lord tells the prophet: "Call his name, not my people." Osee i. They have ceased to be my people; and the quality thou shalt henceforward affix to them shall be, that "they are not my people." This is their name, this is the characteristic by which thou shalt distinguish them; for, since they have forgotten me to follow strange gods, they have renounced me as their God, and I have renounced them as my people.

And this mode of speaking is so usual with God in the sacred page, that when the children of Israel, by a monstrous idolatry, sacrificed to the golden calf in the wilderness, Almighty God, moved to anger and irritated against them, spoke to Moses only in these words: "Away, get thee down, thy people hath sinned" (Exod. xxii.); where it is observable, beloved Christians, that he styles them not his own people, but the people of Moses; as if this people, since their relapsing into infidelity, belonged not to him, nor he to them. But these words, which are only minatory as I may say in this life, and which are carried into execution at most but partially, since they take not away from the soul either the hopes or the means of retrieving the loss which she hath suffered, will be totally and to the letter accomplished in the damned. No more alliance, no more union between God and them. As if God

should say to them: your libertinism made you wish that there were no God, and no God you shall have. You would not know your God, and your God you shall never see or know. You were never at the pains to seek God—you shall seek him to no purpose, you shall never find him; and that which made you impious shall henceforward make you wretched.

But herein it is that their wo will be placed. Could they be totally deprived of, and separated from God, they would be miserable but in part. But the highest aggravation of their wretchedness will be, to be deprived of him one way, and not another; to be separated from him one way, and inseparable another: to be deprived of him inasmuch as he was the object of their felicity, and pierced with him inasmuch as he shall be the eternal cause of their most violent transports, will fill them with amazement and pangs of despair. He will renounce them in quality of father, of protector, of last end: that is, as he is benovolent, mild, and amiable; and he will adhere to them in quality of judge, of enemy, of avenger, of persecutor; that is, every way that renders him severe and dreadful. Wherefore the damned will be doubly unhappy: in having yet a God, and in having one no more; in having yet a God declared and armed against them, and in having one no more favourable, propitious, and merciful to them; in having yet a God to inflame their hatred and most deadly aversions, and in having one no more to satisfy their desires and most ardent inclinations. For, in this will consist their punishment—to reflect eternally that God had created them for himself, and that they could not be happy but in the possession of him, and through his means; and to receive from him eternally repulse and contempt, and to find eternally an insurmountable obstacle between him and them. They will esteem him in spite of themselves, will have a natural inclination for him, and will hate him notwithstanding; they will esteem him in the manner they can never possess him, and will hate him in the manner he must always be present to them. Now this collision of esteem and hatred, of desire and aversion, of recession and pursuit, relatively to one and the same object is that very thing which we denominate the pain of loss in hell.

2ndly. After all this, in vain should I expatiate on the sensible pains with which this separation from God is accompanied; pains, of which the preachers have endeavoured a thousand times, to no purpose, to make you comprehend the horror. In vain should I

set about depicting that fire, which will exercise, according to St. Augustin's expression, in a manner equally real and surprising, its whole activity on substances material and immaterial; that fire, which obliges, even at this moment, the rich glutton to utter that lamentable outcry, "I am tormented in this flame" (Luke xvi.), and of which every one of the damned might say with much more reason than the good man Job, "Thou tormentest me wondrously." Job. x. Ah! my God, will you then work miracles to increase my torments? Will you break through the established laws of nature, giving to a material being—to make it the instrument of your vengeance—the virtue to act upon a spiritual substance? Should I tell you, Christians, that the most frightful objects which the world can produce, or imagination represent; that the greatest cruelties which the tyrants of old could ever devise; that whatever the patience of God's holy martyrs was capable of enduring; that all this, and ten thousand times more, were not so much as the shadow of this fire; that is to say, that the most accute pains, the most protracted punishments, tortures, racks, the most unheard of kinds of death, compared with this fire, did not deserve to be called torments, I should tell you nothing but what St. Augustin, from whom this is borrowed, hath said already. I should tell you nothing but what St. Jerom hath said already on this menace of God to his people: "My wrath shall be poured down upon this place." 2 Paral. xxxiv. For, says this father, what then will it be, when he shall pour down whole torrents of his wrath in hell? I should tell you nothing but what Peter Damian hath said already, speaking of the scourges with which Egypt was afflicted. For according to the remark of that learned cardinal, it was the finger only of God that struck the Egyptians; but it will be his very arm, nay, his whole arm that will strike the damned. I should tell you nothing but what all others have already said, as well as these; and their authority—especially so constant and unanimous—though there were no other proof, should be abundantly sufficient for us to renounce whatever the libertinism of the world opposes to a truth so solidly established.

But now, Christians, I shall quit this topic, in order to join with you in a material reflection—a reflection from which, if it possessed your minds, I might reasonably expect the most happy consequences. This is what we learn from faith: an eternal fire and an eternal separation from God are declared to us throughout the in-

spired writings. What astonishes me, and what would greatly disturb me, did not the Scriptures disclose the mystery, is that a doctrine so affecting affects us so little, and that of those who hear me there are perhaps some who have never been thoroughly affected with it. What astonishes me is, that being so very selfish, such lovers of ourselves, so uneasy under pain—this fire, which was kindled by God in his anger to punish our crimes, makes so feeble and unavailing an impression on us. What astonishes me is, that although we well know the loss of God is our sovereign evil, and that this loss, irreparable in hell, depends on that loss of him which we voluntarily suffer in the present life, we should consent freely every day to lose him; that we should lose him without any disturbance or grief; that often we should lose him even with a secret joy; and that of all the losses which we suffer in the world this should be the most indifferent to us. What astonishes me is, that the same faith which informs me there is a hell in which the damned burn, and are deprived of God, informs me that a single sin exposes us to the one and the other, and that God hath no smaller vengeance to punish it than the one and the other; and yet that a sin the most grievous and deadly should be looked upon among us as youthful frolic, excusable frailty, and not unfrequently as a jest, as mirth, as wit, as humour and good fellowship.

Is this stupidity? is it inadvertence? is it madness? is it enchantment? Do we believe this fundamental point of Christianity or do we not? If we belive it where is our wisdom? If we do not believe where is our religion? I proceed farther: if we do not believe it what then do we believe, since nothing is more credible, nothing revealed in more express terms by the divine word, nothing more solidly found on the basis of human reason, nothing of which the belief is more necessary to restrain us within the bounds of duty—nothing of which to doubt is more pernicious, since it naturally precipitates into vicious courses and all kinds of wickedness. But though we do not believe it, or though we believe it but imperfectly, are we therefore in the least the more remote from the danger of it? Shall we be able to exculpate ourselves in the presence of God, by telling him, Lord, I did not believe it. Shall we stave off thereby its consequences? And if it prove true, though we did not believe it, what will become of us? Is it reasoning like men to run any hazard in such a case? What do we not every day do to avoid an uncertain evil, for no

other reason than that it is uncertain? Have we made, like those sinners of whom the prophet speaks, a contract with hell? Or have we a demonstration and perfect evidence that there is no hell? Is what the ungodly allege to oppose it to be put in comparison with what faith teaches? Is it acting wisely to refuse to join issue with faith? Is it not, I do not say the most secure, but the most plausible and reasonable determination? What more natural punishment for a soul that hath revolted against God than the loss of God? What more just chastisement than fire for a sensual soul, addicted to infamous beastly pleasures strictly forbidden by the law of God! Though the torment of fire, which is an evil to the creature, be in itself so dreadful, is it any way comparable to the grievousness of sin, which is an evil to the Creator? and is it not consentaneous with the dictates of reason that what is evil offered to the Creator should be avenged by that which is evil to the creature?

Alas! Christians, we must now take up an invariable resolution, and declare ourselves relatively to this point. David said to God: the fire of your justice, applied to me by your mercy, hath purified me in such a manner that my crimes are all vanished: "Thou hast examined me with fire and iniquity was not found in me." Ps. xvi. Let us enter, Christians, into the spirit of these words concerning hell fire, and let us ruminate upon them with serious attention. Before God punisheth us, or rather lest he punish us with this fire, let us try what power and effect it hath; let us search our hearts to the end we may be able to say to the Almighty: "Thou hast examined we with fire and iniquity was not found in me." Let hell fire, says St. Augustin, serve to stir up within us another fire, and again to extinquish a third fire: that is, let it awaken the fire of charity, and put out that of lustful desires. When the spirit of impurity would kindle in our hearts the fire of concupiscence, let us put ourselves the question, like that holy anchorite attacked in the wilderness by a violent temptation: how now, thou sinful flesh, thou voluptuous and unmortified flesh, wilt thou be able to endure the scorching flames to which thou shalt be condemned for thy criminal pleasures? There is no passion which this thought would not subdue. Instigated and encouraged by this reflection what have not the saints done? "They have quenched," to use St. Paul's expression, "the violence of fire." Heb. xi. I mean, that, surrounded by the scandals of the world, in which they were

engaged by their condition in life, they preserved their innocence; that in spite of the corruption and profligacy of the world they remained pure and unspotted; that the contagion of bad example had no effect on them, because they had in view that devouring fire with which they were threatened, and which they essayed to escape with all diligence. Would it not be strange if it were not equally active in us, and after working such miracles in the saints it had not the virtue to repress the irregular desires of our hearts?

When once we shall quench the fire of concupiscence it will be no hard matter to light up in our souls the fire of charity, that sacred fire which the Son of God brought down from heaven, and which he came himself to send upon the earth; that "fire which he ardently wishes may be kindled" Luke xii.; that fire of divine love which it is hardly possible, being so imperfect and selfish as we are, we should cherish in this life, if the fire of hell, by a salutary fear, help not to preserve it.

Let us fear, beloved Christians, the one in order to dispose ourselves for the other. Let our minds be filled with the thoughts of the one that we may not undergo the pains of the other. Let us often beg of God that he would deign to inflame us with the fire of his love, to the end we may escape the fire of his justice. In a word, let hell, by a wonderful agency, be a preservative for us against hell itself. And now I shall enter upon the third and last part, wherein I shall shew you the unhappiness of the damned with regard to the future, through despair of ever feeling the divine clemency.

Part III. To seek in futurity comfort and remedies for present evils is an instinct natural to persons in pain. As happiness is always the object of our wishes, and a necessary inclination, it supports itself in the midst of the greatest sufferings, or rather in some measure supports us. Our hope is an anodyne that alleviates the pain with which we are oppressed. Though it frequently happens that there is nothing favourable to us in futurity, we see in it, notwithstanding, ten thousand things which fancy creates and which will never exist, but which it is sufficient to represent to ourselves, in our mind, as possibly contingent to find in them wherewith to feed the imagination. The very uncertainty of future contingencies is useful to us, since it enables us to hope not only for the things which we have reason to hope for and expect, but for those which we have no reason either to hope for or expect.

The case is otherwise with the damned in hell; they suffer, I do not say without a glimmer of hope, but are in an actual and perpetual state of desperation. That which as yet hath no existence is a torment to them, and aggravates their wretchedness more than that which exists; or rather that which exists torments them not only because it exists, but because it will never cease to exist; so that the future is to the present an additional pain, which exasperates it, which carries it to the utmost height, and which is the proper characteristic of reprobation: for, according to the opinion of the angelical doctor, hell is not, properly speaking, hell but as it bears a relation to an hereafter. This, then, is what overwhelms the damned in hell, and what you have not as yet, perhaps, thoroughly comprehended—that they despair of ever obtaining any favour from God, though they should offer up their prayers to all eternity—that they despair of ever moving God by repentance, though they should detest their sins to all eternity—that they despair not only of discharging but of ever diminishing their debts by sufferings, though they must suffer to all eternity. These, indeed, are three infallible resources in life, but absolutely unavailing to a damned soul, namely—prayer, repentance, and sufferings.

1st. Of this we have an instance in the rich glutton. What doth he do?—he prays. What doth he ask?—he beseeches Abraham, as a special favour, to grant him one drop of water, but it is refused him. All the interpreters are agreed, that this circumstance is parabolical and figurative; that the intention of Jesus Christ is, to give us thereby to understand that in hell there is no favour or redemption to be hoped for; that from the ocean of the mercy and goodness of God, there never will fall on these hapless creatures one drop to comfort them, as there never will fall on them one drop of the blood of the Redeemer to save them. The reason is, that the time of mercy and salvation is no more. In vain, therefore, shall the reprobated sinner, like the rich man in the Gospel, eternally cry out, not indeed to Abraham, but to God himself, "Have pity upon me." Luke xvi. O heaven! O heaven! a little respite, a little compassion. But God to his cries will answer eternally, will answer in all the rigour of the letter, as he answered his people: "Why criest thou for thy afflictions?" Jer. xxx. To what purpose these plaints, these dolorous accents? They strike my ear, but they reach not my heart: no remedy no, redress left. And would you know the reason? It is this, that you have been

so long deaf to my entreaties; that I have called upon you a thousand and a thousand times, but you would not hearken to me; that you so outrageously, so wilfully, so constantly held out against me. Thus shall be accomplished that Gospel declaration, "That God hears not sinners." But what sinners? not the sinners of this life: for, in this life, they are ever in a condition to turn their hearts to God; not repenting sinners—for, repentance in this life is ever all-powerful in the presence of God—but sinners unrepenting at the hour of death, sinners consummated in their evil ways, sinners eternally doomed to hell.

2nd. What do I say? Even in hell is there not such a thing as repentance? yes Christians: and it is there that the penetrating eye of wisdom discovers sinners oppressed with pain, sighing and moaning, and pouring forth uninterrupted torrents of tears. Alas! it is not these acts of repentance, but the principle which sanctifies it, that is wanting to them. That is (and in a few words it comprises the whole of this reprobation), they shall moan eternally, they shall weep eternally, they shall eternally suffer in a state of repentance, but a forced repentance, a repentance peculiar to the devils and the damned. Now the repentance of this sort, St. Augustin tells us, will never have efficacy to blot out sin: consequently sin will endure for ever, and while sin endures, they will be equally responsible to God's justice, and exposed to his vengeance. This Abraham, from his seat of glory, explains by that mighty impassible gulf interposed between him and the rich glutton: "Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed" (Luke xvi.); so that from those mansions of eternal bliss in which Abraham rests, it is impossible to fall into the place of everlasting torments in which the rich man suffers; and from the place of everlasting torments in which the rich man suffers it is impossible to rise to the mansions of eternal bliss in which Abraham rests. The reason is, that in the one it is impossible to lose divine grace, and in the other to make due reparation for sin. "They," says Abraham, "who would pass from hence to you, cannot; neither can they pass to us who would come from thence." Luke xvi.

3rd. How then! to suffer everlastingly, and by such long, such painful and cruel sufferings to make no atonement: can this be comprehended? Whether, beloved hearers, you comprehend it or not, this is indubitable, and one of the fundamental articles of your faith. Origen questioned it; and others, treading in his

footsteps, reduced the eternity of hell to a certain number of ages. To maintain their error, they alleged that it was incompatible with God's goodness or justice to punish for ever creatures which he formed, and to require for the sins of so short a life a satisfaction without end. Thus they reasoned. But I, with Tertullian and St. Augustin, shall draw from their very principles a conclusion quite different. For God is good, and who doth not know it? But this goodness, Tertullian observes, is not only mercy, but sanctity in God. Now this sanctity always subsisting, must needs be always an enemy to sin, and by a necessary consequence, must always hate sin, always prosecute sin, always punish sin, if the sin always last. As there is nothing, therefore, in hell to abolish and destroy sin, there will never be anything to withhold its chastisment. The case is parallel with respect to God's justice. For so many ages the rich glutton hath been frantic and outrageous in the midst of flames, in which he was buried, and cries out incessantly, "I am tormented in this flame." Luke xvi. But what he said so many ages ago he says at this present, and will always say, because he still feels, and shall always feel the same torments. Yes, these terrifying and afflictive words, "Now thou art tormented," will ever ring in his ears." "Now!" How extensive is this "now," since it takes in and comprises a whole eternity! "Now:" that is—to-day and always; that is—to-morrow and always; that is—for a year, for an age, for millions of ages, and always still more. Think then, if possible, what impression such dreadful despair must make on a reprobated soul.

I do not take upon me to convey to you a just conception of eternity. Such abilities are not allotted to our limited faculties. The more we endeavour to fathom this gulf the more we are perplexed and lost in the search. You may use what figures and comparisons you please: for my own part I shall wave comparisons and figures, and restrict myself to faith; and, seized with a reasonable and salutary fear, shall lay myself prostrate before that justice which as yet may be moved to shew us some favour, but which will be inflexible after death. O my Lord, if ever I offered up at the foot of your altar my most fervent prayers for my hearers and for myself, this is the most sincere, this the most ardent: that your grace may enlighten us, and break the charm by which we are infatuated. Often have you sent me to this court, in order to set forth your divine doctrines; but of all your doctrines, what

other should excite my zeal like this? There I see worldlings taken up with the world, possessed with the world, enchanted with the world. I see them afflicted, abashed, thunderstruck, at every the least reverse of fortune, at every thing that obstructs their ambitious projects, at every thing that disconcerts their criminal intrigues—but in regard to eternity, no disquietude, no attention. Whether it proceeds from an affected freedom of thought and impiety, or from a presumptuous confidence and blind temerity, or from forgetfulness, or negligence, or insensibility; be that as it may, they live in peace, and without uneasiness. Hundreds of times have we described the horror of an eternal damnation; but they hear our words as the sons of Lot heard those of their father, who rebuked them, and threatened them on the part of God, with a general conflagration: "He seemed unto them as one that mocked," Gen. xix. Fired with indignation, might we not justly pray you, after the example of your prophets, to make yourself known to them, and to hurl down upon them the thunder of your justice? But, O my God, we reflect that if once they fall into the hands of that inexorable justice they can never be withdrawn from it; that if once they are damned, or if once they force you to declare their damnation, it must last for ever, it is irreversible. And this is what awakens all our compassion. Otherwise we know that they are precious souls, souls redeemed at the price of your blood, souls invited to partake of your glory. And shall they, O my God, be lost eternally to you, and shall you be eternally lost to them?

These are matters, beloved hearers, which cannot be thought of with too much attention. And if you think not of them now, when will you think of them? Will it be at that moment, that melancholy moment, when you first shall feel the inexpressible heat of those devouring flames? But what will it avail you to think then of them? Nay, will not such a thought, far from saving you, be your very torment? O eternity! how salutary in life, how afflictive in hell, is this reflection! If we would not have it, beloved Christians, be the cause of our despair let it move us to penitence. Instead of exposing ourselves to eternal pains for a temporal felicity, let us try to deserve eternal felicity by temporal pains.

SERMON XXX.

ON THE ETERNITY OF HELL.

"*Then the King said to the waiters: bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness. There shall be weeping there and gnashing of teeth.*" MATT. xxii.

THIS is the sentence, beloved Christians, which an earthly king passes upon a person at whose behaviour he is offended; and thus he punishes this man's temerity, who, regardless of majesty and the respect due to his royal master, is present at his banquet, but not attired in the wedding garment. However, this earthly king, rigorous as he seems, is but a faint image of the King of heaven, who, if we have had the misfortune to incur his displeasure, and fall into the hands of his justice, will one day summon us to appear at his bar, there to take our trial, and hear the decree of our reprobation. The most powerful monarchs of this world, when all their punishments are carried to the highest pitch of severity, have after all no power, and can exercise their vengeance only upon bodies, of themselves already perishable and mortal. But to extend his vengeance to the very soul; to make the soul undergo the weight of his wrath; to reprobate her, and ruin her, and involve her in the same damnation with the body, is the essential difference that distinguishes this dreadful, all-powerful judge, whose avenging arm falls so heavily on his enemies, hurls them into the shades of eternal death, and plunges them into the deepest pit of hell. And yet, shall I say it, beloved hearers? It is not precisely on this account, it is not for the actual and present pain, which the reprobated sinner is constrained to suffer, but for its infinite duration, that this sovereign master seems most to be dreaded. If the pain were not eternal, there would be hopes of an end; and these hopes, in the extremity of anguish, would be a relief and support. But a pain without end, without hope, without remedy, is what I purpose to set forth as the height of wretchedness, and the most afflicting situation. This is the inexhaustible source of those tears, this the cause of that gnashing of teeth mentioned in the Gospel:

"There shall be weeping there and gnashing of teeth." You see, Christians, the important subject I have undertaken to handle. I mean to expatiate, for your present instruction, on the eternity of hell. And because it is one of those capital verities which are but too evident, I shall only lay before you the most common notions that are given of it, without borrowing assistance from art or study.

In every age since the church was established people have discoursed on the eternity of hell; and to say nothing of your unbelievers and your professed libertines, who have refused to subscribe to this fundamental article of our faith, there have been heretofore as there are at this time, in the midst of Christianity, weak, wavering irresolute Christians, whose minds have been disturbed with doubts and uncertainties relative to this eternity of hell, and whom their disturbance hath cooled in the exercise of religious duties. The soul no sooner begins to give way in this point of faith than she loses the apprehension of God's judgment, and relaxes proportionally in the practice of her duties, till at last she sinks into a total neglect. Therefore, Christians, it is absolutely necessary to put you upon your guard against doubts and uncertainties which, however involuntary, are oftentimes liable to have bad effects; and, to counteract and dissipate them, I need only propose the very principles of the faith we profess. But in order to enlarge the plan of my subject, I take upon me to oppose, in this discourse, another inordination, equally common and not less blameable—it is, to believe the eternity of hell, or at least to persuade yourselves that you believe it, and with a perfect faith too, in all that regards the submission of the understanding; and, notwithstanding all that, to take no resolution, I say no solid and efficacious resolution, towards the regulating of your lives and applying with more zeal to Christian works. For, is not this the most untenable of all contradictions? Thus, my brethren, to lay in a few words my design before you.

First, I shall show you how faith should confirm us in the steadfast belief of the eternity of hell. Secondly, how the steadfast belief of the eternity of hell should excite us to practise the works of faith. Both the one and the other are well deserving of your particular attention.

Part I. The eternity of the torments, beloved Christians, which the damned in hell suffer is a mystery, the belief of which

seems to involve great difficulties. But I add that faith, in all that regards the truth of this article, should rectify our errors and fully and clearly inform our understandings. Now this it doth; and endeavour, I beseech you, to take my meaning thoroughly. Almighty God communicates to mankind a mysterious truth, replete with terror, and that should keep us in awe; namely, that every sin, in its nature deadly, deserves to be punished with eternal torments; and this article he enforces and confirms with the whole weight and strength of his authority, as by the mouths of his prophets—for their fire, says Isaias, shall never be extinguished; by the mouths of his apostles—those who resist the Gospel, says St. Paul, shall suffer pains eternally; by the divine oracles of the incarnate Word—go, ye accursed, says our blessed Saviour, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for you from the beginning of the world; by the unanimous consent of the whole Church, which at all times hath interpreted the sacred text in this sense; by the decisions of the councils, which have declared it to us in express terms; by the tradition of both laws, the old and the new, which hath always, on these important heads, held the same language in short, by all the maxims of faith, which declares to us a punishment, eternal in its duration, as due for a single and momentary sin, if such be its malignity as to cause a disunion between us and our God, and break the tie that should unite us with him. Is any doctrine more solidly established? Nevertheless, against this doctrine, against this revelation, so authentically delivered, the mind of man hath often raised difficulties, that is, errors; and when it submits, it seeks out for reasons to justify to itself this astonishing proportion between eternal punishments and momentary sins. Now to what purpose is faith applied? Or to what purpose ought it to be applied? I have said it, and I repeat it—to rectify these errors, as opposed to the primitive and infallible truth, and to corroborate and perfect the light of our understandings, by which we conceive some idea of this mystery, so remote from our mortal knowledge or senses. Such is the scope of this first part, which you will find includes many necessary instructions.

1st. I speak not of atheism, which, by denying a God, denies the author of eternal torments. Neither do I speak of the impiety of Epicurus, which, by teaching that the soul dies together with the body, destroys whatever is capable of undergoing eternal torments. There are, however, three errors not quite so gross,

and seemingly more reasonable, which have vehemently impugned the eternity of torments with regard to the proportion between that and sin. Some have maintained that eternity of sufferings for one sin, how enormous soever, was utterly repugnant to the goodness of God; others have imagined it derogatory from his justice; and others again have outgone these by supposing it beyond the reach of his omnipotence. God is too good to torment eternally a sinful soul; he is too just to inflict punishment through endless ages for a momentary crime; he wants the power to make a created being subsist in anguish to all eternity. This is their way of reasoning. But I, my brethren, undertake to show that our faith, in her principles, hath wherewith to strengthen us against these errors, and thus she proceeds.

Now replies she to the first—eternal sufferings for one sin are not incompatible with the divine justice; and what deceives you is the groundless notion you conceive of this sovereign goodness of God. You would have it to consist of a weak indulgence in tolerating and authorizing moral evil; but it is that would destroy it, as it would be no longer that which it is, the moment it left off to hold sin in abhorrence in the same degree in which it abhors it. Why do we say that Almighty God is sovereignly good (it is a remark of Tertullian), but because he abhors and detests evil in a sovereign degree? And what is it with regard to Almighty God to have a sovereign abhorrence and detestation of evil but to be its unrelenting prosecutor and avenger? Thus he argued against Marcion. Know then, O man! (it is the same Tertullian that speaks) know what that good God is. He is a God essentially opposed to sin, a God everlastingly an enemy to sin, and, by a necessary consequence, a God an eternal prosecutor of sin—so that the moment he should cease to prosecute sin, in order to condemn it, and bring it to due punishment, he would cease to be God, good in the manner in which he is and must be. But what would the sinner have? He would have, by adapting his notions of goodness to the bent of his passions, a God that would suffer the crimes of men in process of time to be unmolested, and would think him good because he would render man wicked, by giving him assurance of future forgiveness. Hence, continues the same Tertullian, you will not acknowledge this goodness of God, the essence of which is that it never can possibly coincide with sin or desist one moment in the hatred it bears it. But if you will not acknowledge it, all the

saints and true believers that were any way versed in the science of God have unanimously acknowledged it. They have confessed it openly, they have published and glorified it, because enlightened with wisdom superior to yours, and quite celestial, they saw that God must be good in that manner, and by the regular and unaltered course of his holiness in no other.

To trace the error I oppose to its source: Origen was the first who would have God more merciful than he really is; or rather, as St. Augustin observes, who would appear himself more merciful than God, when he asserted that after a certain limited space of time a period would be put to the pains which the reprobated souls endure. Of this heresy he became the ringleader, for which he was excluded from the fellowship of the faithful. Accordingly, Christians, observe, I beseech you, the prodigious infatuation incident to man when once destitute of the light of faith. This same Origen, who, through a presumptuous opinion of God's goodness, denied that the pains of the damned were eternal, through another error directly contrary, setting bounds to the infinite mercy of God, went such lengths as to maintain that the glory of the blessed would one day have an end, and that as the reprobate would in time pass from the state of suffering to that of repose, so the saints who reign with God would change from time to time by a monstrous vicissitude, their state of repose for that of suffering, to purify themselves still more and more, and discharge more fully the debts contracted in the course of life. Behold, says St. Augustine, how this man who, on one side so strenuously contended in behalf of the divine mercy, so contumeliously, on the other, injures and affronts it, and loses the advantage he enjoyed of being its chief asserter and most zealous advocate; whereas if he allowed the reprobate a false hope of beatitude he took from the predestinate the solid assurance of an eternity of happiness. But, after all, might Origen say, why then should we so much extol the goodness and mercy of God, the creator of the universe, if whole ages of satisfaction and pains be not sufficient to expiate, in his presence, a single crime and extinguish the ardour of his divine vengeance? Ah! cries St. Gregory, how ingenious is man at deducing consequences from the goodness of God against God himself! And I say for answer, why, therefore, doth the Scripture so loudly thunder out its menaces and decrees, by which the sinner is condemned to this dreadful eternity of torments, if there be any room left to suppose

that he is not to be eternally tormented? Strange, says this great pope and doctor, that people should take such pains to ascertain the goodness of God, and to vindicate his mercy, and should not fear to make him the author of falsehood, as if there were more favour in his judgments than veracity in his words.

In fact, the same Scripture by which I learn that God hath bowels of mercy for men, at the same time declares to me in the most express terms that in hell there are flames enkindled for the eternal torment of sinners. My faith allows me to doubt no more of the one than the other. But I am by the one obliged to rectify the wrong notions I may have imbibed with regard to the other. For instead of saying God is the origin all good, therefore he will not eternally punish the sins of men; I should say God will eternally punish the sins of men, although he is the origin of all good, and goodness itself, because such is the doctrine which faith delivers, and it is one of the fundamental truths of religion. Thus neither the goodness of God excludes an eternity of pains nor is an eternity of pains exclusive of God's goodness. But how and by what means to reconcile in God this supreme goodness and extreme severity is a province into which I am not to penetrate; but it is an undoubted article of religion, to which my duty obliges me to assent. It is enough that I know both the one and the other, and that I know them, as I do, without any the least alloy of doubt, as both the one and the other are revealed to me by the unerring spirit of God. There I stop and advance no farther.

Not but that without diminishing in the least the duration of the pains which the damned undergo, I can absolutely conceive, relatively to God's eternal goodness, whatever I know and whatever I believe. It is easy to conceive how a goodness so much an enemy to sin as to make a God come down from heaven in order to destroy it, and to make him clothe himself with our flesh, take upon him our miseries, and die upon a cross—it is not hard, I say, to comprehend how such a goodness should determine this God, so holy and so good, never to pardon sin. But the shortest way, and the safest too, is to respect this mystery without examing it, and to rest contented with the testimony of my faith which I cannot belie: its knowledge is infallible and beyond the reach of our weak understandings. If, therefore, by obliging me to revere in God a supreme goodness, it at the same time announces an eternity of woes—or if, by announcing an eternity of woes, it at the same

time obliges me to revere in God a supreme goodness—it is more than sufficient to resolve all my doubts. And thus it is, Christians, that faith rectifies the first error concerning the eternity of the pains to which an impenitent and reprobated sinnner is doomed.

Proceed we to the second error: it is that an everlasting punishment is inconsistent with the justice of God. And why? Because it is the property of justice to square the chastisement to the offence, so that the offence by its grievousness shall not be greater than the punishment, nor the punishment by its rigorousness be greater than the offence. Now where is the equality, where the proportion between an eternity of sufferings and a sin that lasted but a few days, a few hours, or even a single moment? If it were my business, beloved hearers, to vindicate otherwise than by faith itself this article of our faith, I might answer that if there be no proportion of duration between eternity and sin, there may be, and there is in fact, between the evilness on one hand and the punishment on the other. But to be more explicit: we are deceived by this, that we would measure the duration of the satisfaction which God hath decreed by the duration of the crime which made the sinner culpable. A fallacious principle, according to St. Augustin; and to see the deceit of it there needs but to consider what every day passes in the common forms of judicature. What dishonour arises from an ignominious punishment and the indelible stain it leaves behind! What sorrow and disquietude from perpetual slavery, banishment, or captivity! Is not all this, as much as may be, a kind of eternity? Nevertheless, we see that the law of the land exerts all this against misdemeanours that scarce are sooner attempted and begun than perpetrated and finished. And when to afflict with punishment crimes committed with so little reflection, and sometimes so speedily, the law doth all this, we see nothing in the punishment that exceeds the crime. It goes still farther; for what is death? (St. Augustin asks) death, of all terrible things to nature the most terrible; death, which deprives us of all temporal blessings by depriving us of that which is most precious, and that is life; death, the effects of which are irreparable, and of which, therefore, the consequences are, as it were, eternal. Yet if the chastisement be for certain crimes, how sudden and transitory soever they may be, we cannot but approve of it, and therein admire the wisdom and equity of human institutions. It is true, continues the same father (and the observation quadrates to my

subject) that the sensation passes, but the effect remains, and this is what is principally proposed by the law. For be pleased to observe that the first and most direct intention of the law is not for some time to torment the criminal, against whom the irrevocable sentence is pronounced, but to penetrate into futurity, and cut off for ever from all intercourse and society with the living, those whom she judges unworthy of them. Whence it follows, that to measure the proportion of the punishment and the offence we must not, at all times, lay down the duration of the one and the other as a certain rule; and that on account of a punishment which never ends, for a single sin which ends so speedily, and the pleasure of which is so very short, no exception can be justly taken to the divine justice.

This, my brethren, is the answer I would make; an answer which if it did not amount to a convincing proof would at least result from the strongest, the most plain and obvious conjectures. But this is not what I proposed to myself; and to keep within the limits of my subject I return to faith. What doth she tell me? Two things—that God is just, and that his vengeance is eternal. She cannot deceive me with respect to either of these two truths, as they are so many oracles pronounced by the origin of all truth. Therefore I must look upon them as incontestable truths. Therefore these two truths clash not, but perfectly coincide with one another. Therefore the punishment of the damned subsists to all eternity, and the justice of God preserves all its integrity—nay it is this same eternity that so conspicuously sets forth the divine justice, as the punishment of the damned is not eternal but because God is just. Therefore, when this eternal punishment is represented to me, I must not conclude that God is unjust; for nothing, says St. Augustin, is unjust which is determined by the origin of all justice. But the deduction to be made is that of St. Ambrose, namely, that sin must be the greatest of all evils, inasmuch as a God infinitely just inflicts for it the greatest of all penalties; that it must include an inexhaustible fund of malignity, inasmuch as by the judgment of the sovereign justice it requires a whole eternity to repair it; that the world must be insufferably involved in darkness when it beholds sin with so great indifference, and fears it so little, inasmuch as one sin leads infallibly to the deepest abyss of wretchedness, without the least hope that it will ever have an end. All this is founded in the unquestionable and unalterable principles of religion.

What more now remains for faith so just and so clear to do? To rectify the third error, which denies that God hath the power of exercising his eternal vengeance on the same person, and making him perpetually and invariably feel the cruel assaults and lively impression of the fire that burns him. An error of all errors the most frivolous and despicable for any one that possesses the slightest notion of an omnipotent God. As if God could not communicate peculiar qualities—qualities above the course and laws of nature—to the fire which he choses to be the instrument of his wrath; as if God, who made all things out of nothing, and supports by the sole act of his will all created things, as we learn by faith, wanted might and efficacy to maintain the activity of this fire without fuel or matter. As if it were a difficult task for God, after having formed the body and the soul, to make the one incorruptible as well as the other, without making it impassible any more than the other, and to keep them in flames, which operate upon them with inexpressible violence and without alteration. As if this were a greater miracle for God than so many prodigies which our faith places before our eyes, and to perform which she tells us that there needed but "the finger of God." What then will it be when he shall stretch forth his arm and make the weight of it fall on rebellious creatures, the objects of his hate? Who can comprehend it? And what a horrible thing it is to learn it by fatal experience? "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Isai. liii. Ah! beloved hearers, let us not try by unprofitable interrogatories and dangerous researches to diminish the fear, the salutary fear, which the spirit of Christianity exercises within us. Let us believe, and with a holy apprehension of his judgments, let us render due homage to the justice, the goodness, and the power of our God. Let us not fondly listen to our heart, which deceives itself and would impose upon us. As it is disturbed at the sight of everlasting torments, and this disturbance importunes and checks it in the hurry and precipitance of irregular passions, it endeavours by every means it can to break through this obstacle, and is ingenious at finding out a thousand subtleties whereby to elude the most essential truths. Let us reason less and proceed to action. Neither our philosophy nor our reasoning can secure us against these so tremendous judgments; but what will preserve us is docility of faith and holiness of works; and this is, beyond dispute, the wisest resolution, because evidently the safest.

2nd. I pretend not, however, that reason in this case ought not to be consulted, according as it submits to and agrees with faith. I shall not even fear to make it speak in this place, and collect together whatever she hath discovered to vindicate God's will and the irrevocable decree which condemns the sinner to eternal pains. For this, dear Christians, is the terrible mystery which in every age hath employed the pens of the greatest men in the church of God, and the most learned and experienced in divine things; and though the judgments of God do not stand in need of being justified by men, as of themselves they are sufficiently justified, according to the prophet: "The judgments of the Lord are true, justified in themselves" (Ps. xviii.); nevertheless those holy doctors have thought it proper to discuss the justness of this dreadful eternity, and for that purpose have made use of all the lights and arguments within the narrow limits of the human mind. Perhaps you are already no strangers to them; but perhaps I shall place them in another point of view than that in which you have hitherto seen them; for my design by producing them is not so much to display the whole force of them, as to show you in what manner they are improved by faith. This is what I am engaged in and what I have reason to presume will renew your attention.

The first argument is borrowed from St. Jerom and St. Augustin. Yes, my brethren, says St. Jerom, the sinner must make eternal satisfaction to God, because he had the will to resist God eternally. This thought is equally solid and true; but that we may take the right meaning of it let us hear St. Augustin, who hath thrown upon this subject all the light it would admit. This holy doctor excellently remarks that in a perverse and criminal will we must not precisely consider the effect, but much more the will itself, the affection of the heart; and although the effect, which depends not on man, should fail, it is just and reasonable that the will should be punished, and that the punishment should be proportioned to its evil disposition. For the justness of this I appeal to conscience. And what is more evident than that those lovers of themselves and of the world, those slaves of pleasure and of sensual desires, so many sinners intoxicated with sin, appear before God, the searcher of their souls and most hidden intentions, disposed in such a manner that they would never forego the good things of this life, but would eternally enjoy the same objects of their passions, and would gladly resign all other felicity? If the act of sinning,

therefore, doth not endure, the love of sin and the attachment to sin are in some shape eternal; so that in the disposition of the sinner is included a secret will, or rather, to speak in the language of the schools, an interpretative will to be for ever a sinner, as he would enjoy for ever that which foments and cherishes sin. Thus (and it is a reflection of St. Gregory, pope) to consider well your unbelievers and whatever is comprised under the name of sinner, they cease to sin only because they cease to live; and they could wish to live for ever that they might sin for ever; and if they desire to enjoy life, it is not, properly, for the sake of life but for the sake of sinning. For life, which to them is so dear and precious, would without sin be insipid and irksome. The necessary proportion, therefore, is observed between the eternity of their pains and the malignity of their hearts. Nor is it matter of astonishment that the punishment should be endless since the will was unlimited.

This is not all: for to this argument St. Thomas adds another. In whatever disposition, says he, the will of man when he sins may be, it is evident to me that the sin he commits is irreparable in its nature; that it is irreparable, it is in that sense eternal, and therefore deserving of eternal punishment. A mortal sin cannot be obliterated but by one or other of these two means: either the sinner must make satisfaction to God, worthy of acceptance, or God a gratuitous and absolute resignation of his right to man. That the sinner, I mean the reprobated sinner, being destitute of grace, should satisfy God is an impossibility. That God should resign his right to man is what he is not obliged to, and what cannot be demanded or expected from him. Therefore this sin, in the strictest justice, will not be repaired to all eternity, but will appear as a sin in the eyes of God. Now so long as sin remains uneffaced by any reparation, it must, concludes the angelical doctor, undergo punishment, and the duration of the punishment must be perfectly correspondent with the duration of the sin.

Further: divines, with St. Augustin, draw a third argument from the nature of sin. For, what is sin? It is a voluntary estrangement from God, an open contempt of God, a love of creatures in preference to God, a great, an atrocious injury done to the majesty of God. This being laid down as an uncontroverted and universally received truth, let us measure, says St. Gregory, the grievousness of the injury by the greatness of the master to whom it is offered, and we shall find that in its object it is infinitely

grievous, being offered to a master of infinite greatness. Now a sin of infinite grievousness requires an infinite punishment. And how will that be? Will it be in itself, and in its own essence? That clashes with the nature of a created being. It must, therefore be infinite, as far as punishment is susceptible of infinitude, and must extend into the immensity of ages to come. By no other means can God do himself justice. Without this eternity, there would always remain an infinite distance between the offence and the punishment. But though Almighty God, by this eternity, be not fully satisfied, as the punishment being eternal is never fully accomplished, there is, notwithstanding, all possible equality between the punishment and the crime.

Such, beloved hearers, have been the productions of the human mind, relative to the subject of eternal woes. Thus far arrived those sublime reasoners, whom God had replenished with his heavenly wisdom, and with the gift of comprehension. These are the discoveries which they made and the lights which they followed. Let us revere their opinions so solidly enforced, and their aim, upon examination, will prove just and holy. It must, however, be owned, that faith must come in aid to improve and confirm them. But to know in what manner she confirms and improves them, ah! Christians, this is one of those secrets known only to the humble and truly faithful soul. She doth it not by elevating our minds, but rather by depressing their elevation; not by leaving them a presumptuous liberty of examining and debating, but by submitting them to the authority and mysterious obscurity of the word of God; not by drawing off the veil which it places before our eyes, and representing the truth to us in a clear light, but by making us rest satisfied, whatever difficulties and embarrassments may arise, with this answer of St. Paul, which resolves all doubts and removes all difficulties: "O the depth!" (Rom. xi.) O the judgment of my God! O the inexhaustible and hidden treasure not only of his wisdom, and of his mercy, but moreover of his justice! I can easily perceive some faint appearance of them; but it behoves me not to search into them too narrowly. "How incomprehensible are his judgments, and how unsearchable are his ways!" Rom. xi. And which of us can read in the word of God, what, and to what end, are all his designs? "For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor?" Rom. xi. Though I should, therefore, in order to sound this

abyss, make a thousand efforts, if I would not be bewildered in mazes and intricacies, I must perpetually recur to the fundamental principle, and in all humility cry out, "O the depth."

How admirable is this, beloved brethren! Our hearts have no sooner received from faith this previous disposition and inward submission, than ready to make a sacrifice of all our reasonings, and totally to renounce them, our reasoning faculty gets collateral assistance, of which I shall give you this demonstration. As we are no longer influenced by particular prejudices, but wholly divested of our own opinions, to which we obstinately adhered, we comprehend and judge with a more refined understanding and sounder sense, those sublime ideas which faith gives us of the majesty, the goodness, the justice, and the holiness of God, and consequently of the audacity of man, who, by sinning, rises up against this infinite majesty; of the ingratitude of man, who, by sinning, turns against this sovereign goodness; of the malignity and corruption of the heart of man, who, by sinning, offends this inflexible justice, and this holiness eternally and necessarily an enemy to evil doings: these grand objects not being enfeebled, either by the wrong prepossessions of an untractable mind, or the blind desires of an impassioned heart, appear in their genuine strength and power, and make, irresistibly, the due impression. We comprehend them with less difficulty, and it would seem, at certain moments, as if we had a distinct knowledge of them, and I know not what feeling that takes up and possesses the whole soul. It would seem as if all eternity were displayed before our eyes, and we surveyed, in some sort, the unbounded prospect. We behold it as much as it is possible for our weak minds to behold it, in all its horror; and instead of employing our thoughts and time in fruitless disquisitions, we think only of humbling ourselves under the omnipotent hand of God, and thereby preventing his dreadful decrees. We say with holy Job, "Verily I know it is so" (Job. ix.); for this is the assurance which I have from my God; and the wisest thing I can do is, not to enter into empty disputes and stubborn contests concerning the truth of this divine word, but to follow the most safe and effectual method of avoiding the disaster with which I am threatened. All, therefore, that remains for me to do is, to lay myself prostrate at the feet of my judge, to be always before him in a holy apprehension, and by the humility, fervour, and constancy of my prayer, to move him to clemency. Were I the most

righteous of men, this is the disposition in which I should be, and in which I ought to remain to my latest breath. This is the salutary effect of faith; a prudent, yet docile faith, a thousand times more enlightened, than all the knowledge, and all the wisdom of a profane world; a submissive faith, which God maintains by stirring up secret affections in the heart, affections which he cherishes and strengthens by infusing the light of grace, and to which he discovers the most impenetrable mysteries.

Such was the faith of the saints. Was it superstition? was it narrowness of understanding? But which of us knows not in how great esteem those extraordinary persons have been held by antiquity, which respected them as their teachers, and whom we continue to this day to propose to ourselves as our guides and models? What they believed, cannot we believe? And should we be justified at God's tribunal, if we said: Lord, I made no account of this eternity, I heedlessly passed it over, because I did not believe it. No, you did not believe it, but why? Because you were unwilling to believe it; because you affected to believe it not, that it might not be a check upon your evil courses. This is the usual motive to incredulity. Nevertheless, beloved hearers, it is not the less real, whether you believe it or disbelieve it; the proofs that shall convince you are not the less solid; and this will be the cause of your condemnation. But let us not stop there. We have seen how faith shall confirm us in the belief of the eternity of hell; and we shall now see how the belief of the eternity of hell should induce us to put in practice the works of faith, and what that holiness of life is which it requires of us; it is the subject of the second part.

Part II. There is no consequence so justly deduced, as that which is to be the groundwork of this second part, in which I shall show you how the steadfast belief of the eternity of hell should excite our fervency in the practice of good works, and should thoroughly and speedily induce us to set about a reformation of manners. For that eternal fire, that fire of hell, or, if you please, that fire of the other world, should extinguish a fire in us which devours and destroys us—the fire of our irregular passions—and should kindle in us another, which is an efficacious charity and holy zeal for the regulation and management of our whole conduct. This consequence is founded on two principles: the one is, the love of ourselves, that reasonable, that Christian love,

which God commands, and which obliges us to preserve ourselves, by every means possible, from the greatest and most dreadful of all misfortunes; the other is, according to the maxims of our faith, the indispensable necessity of a holy life, that is, of a life either innocent or penitent, in order to ward off the sovereign evil, and not to fall into the horrible and irreparable state of damnation.

In fact, if we love ourselves ever so little, in the manner we are commanded, what should we fear more, and what should we avoid with greater care, than the entire and irreparable loss of ourselves? Let us but examine what we do every day, to preserve the natural life of our bodies. As we are attatched to this frail and mortal life, is there any difficulty too great to preserve it? Are we not alarmed and startled at every danger? Have we not recourse to every remedy? what precaution do we not use? what undertaking is thought too expensive? what do we not submit to? what attention, what vigilance, what resolution, to attempt everything and bear everything? And why all this? To save a life in its nature transitory, and to retard a death at least inevitable, and the pain of which is only the sensation of a few moments. We may therefore judge how great an impression, and with how much more reason, the dreadful apprehension of an eternal death, and an eternal reprobation ought to make on our hearts, by which a sinner, being rejected by God without hope or resource, and being delivered over to all the scourges of his most rigorous justice, will subsist eternally, and to no other end than to endure torments. Unless such be our infatuation and blindness of mind, that we are absolutely forgetful of our own real good, to what should we apply ourselves with greater ardour than to the securing of our souls from so irrevocable a sentence? Now this, you know, cannot be affected but by avoiding sin, renouncing the world, serving God faithfully, observing the law of God, putting all those Christian exercises in practice which sanctify us, and preserve us in the grace of God. Thus is verified the proposition I advanced, that to firmly believe an eternity of pains, is the greatest and most powerful motive of bringing us back to our duty, of maintaining us in a steady course of regularity, and of inducing us to lead a life conformable to the law of Christ. How obstinate soever the sinner may be, I defy him, if his faith be not totally dead, to withstand the cogency of these arguments.

But the better to unravel this important matter, the contemplation of which is so advantageous to us, I hold, that in the belief of everlasting pains we want not, in order to reform our conduct, to omit nothing that may help us agreeably to the precepts of the gospel, and to persist and make progress in the ways of God, I say a motive, at once the most universal and the most affecting—I do not say the most perfect, but only, in the first place, the most universal: for of all the motives which are capable to make impression on a Christian soul, and which can conduct and direct her and induce her to act, this I own, though holy and supernatural, as expressly defined by the Council of Trent, is, after all, the least elevated. But although inferior to other virtues in degree of excellence, I affirm, likewise, that it hath over the rest the peculiar advantage of extending its efficacy to more purposes. This will clearly appear in the sequel.

1st. True it is, to relinquish vice, and after a long series of evil courses, influenced only by pure love to return to God; to engage in the practice of religious duties, and to preserve in it, in hopes of obtaining the promised reward—which is God himself—are superior motives, and much more worthy the spirit of Christianity. It were indeed to be wished, that every soul was raised to this height; and they should, as much as may be, aspire to it. But it is no less true that all are not equally disposed to adopt those noble sentiments, or capable of being affected by views so sublime and wholly divine. Some there are who have arrived at righteousness, at fervency, at perfection; who, like children in the house of the heavenly Father, strive to please and possess him, in expectation only of pleasing and possessing him; and who, being incessantly animated by these very means, inviolably adhere to his divine precepts, and lay it down as a rigorous and unalterable rule, to obey with submission and the utmost readiness the least intimation or sign of his will. They serve him with an affection entirely filial. But there are also dastards, worldlings, sinners, terrestrial and quite sensual men, who are scarcely susceptible of any other impressions than those of the judgments and vengeance of God. Talk to them of his greatness, of his perfections, of his benefits, or even of his rewards, and they will hardly listen to you; and if they are prevailed upon to pay some attention and respect to your words, they will sound in their ears but not reach their hearts. The reason is, that their hearts being darkened by the thick clouds which their

passions spread in them, and being filled with gross ideas, are, according to the apostle, become perfectly sensual. "But the sensual man," adds the same teacher of the Gentiles, "perceiveth not the things that are of the spirit." 1 Cor. ii. Therefore to move them, to stir them up, to awaken and rouse them from the lethargic sleep with which they are overwhelmed, the thunder of divine wrath, and the decrees that condemn them to eternal flames must resound on all sides: "Depart from me, ye accursed, into everlasting fire." Matth. xxv. Make them consider attentively, and represent to them with all the force of grace, the consequences and horror of this word eternal. Ask them, with the prophet, how they will be able for ever and ever to suffer, to burn, to be tormented, without ever, I do not say coming to an end of their anguish, but receiving any relief, or feeling any abatement: "Which of you can dwell with devouring fire; with everlasting burnings?" Isai. xxxiii. Describe the grief, the regret, the affliction, what do I say? the rage, the despair of so many wretches, who now lie oppressed with the weight of God's arm, and his dreadful curse with which he had threatened them, and the whole rigour of which they are doomed to undergo eternally. Prevail with them to reflect on their unhappy situation, and remind them that the damned, whose condition appears so inexpressiby deplorable, and for whom henceforward no hope remains, were not during life, more criminal than they are, and that many among them were not so criminal; that they follow the same course, that they walk in the same track, and by consequence that they are going to the same perdition, and that they must expect to fall headlong in the same gulph, never more to rise. Give them reason to judge what the damned would do were any resource left to procure their release; what they would undertake, what they would endure, what they would sacrifice, what habits they would quit, what penance they would perform, what extremities they would go through; and declare to them that the only advantage they enjoy at present is that they have it in their power to do what the damned have no power to do, but that shortly—if they are not aware—what they now may do, will not be practicable even for them. In a word, conjure them to have pity on their souls. Hold this language and you will be heard more easily. As one who is overpowered with a mortal lethargy gives signs of sensation and opens his eyes on the close application of a red hot iron—so the sinner,

unless he be fallen into the utmost obduracy of heart, will hardly resist these just and frightful reflections. They will damp his spirits, they will fill him with consternation. Conscience will depict them over and over in his mind, and in lively colours, on certain favourable occasions. This man, at last, will come to himself, will confess his crime, will ask pardon of heaven, and the words of the Holy Ghost will be fulfilled in him: "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord." Ps. cx. Innumerable multitudes of worldlings and libertines have been withdrawn by these means from their corrupt ways to the way of salvation. We need but reflect on the history of all ages, and we shall see how efficacious was at all times the thought of a woful eternity, and what fruits of penance and sanctification it produced. It was this thought that led to the tops of mountains and into gloomy caverns so many sensualists, lovers of the world, and still greater lovers of themselves and of their flesh. It was this thought that made them break the chains of sin and strongest passions—that made them change the softest sensuality into all the exercises of corporal mortification; that reduced them to fastings, watchings, continual tears, and self-denials. It was this thought that filled cloisters and monasteries with religious persons of both sexes; that made them all undergo the yoke of a most austere and burthensome regularity; that brought them, like so many victims, to immolate themselves, not sparing either goods or fortune, either pleasure or liberty, either health or life.

Nor must we imagine that this contemplation of eternal unhappiness suits only souls immersed in crimes, such as are covered over, if I may use the expression, with the dust of the world and all the impurities of their vicious inclinations. I have said, and I say it again, that it is suitable to every degree of perfection; and supposing I might, with some show of probability, entertain hopes of being ranked among the number of God's elect, yet would I not cease, in order to support, strengthen, and raise myself, to place before my mind and attentively meditate on the infinite vengeance of an offended Deity. I should think it presumptuous in me to believe, as some persuade themselves, that it would be to degenerate in some measure from the state of perfection, to employ one's mind in such meditations. Ah! beloved hearers, we are not more perfect than the inspired king, who, according to the testimony he bears of himself, in his deepest reflections contemplated eternity,

and, so far as he was able, took a survey of its immense extent. "I thought upon the days of old, and I had in my mind the eternal years." Ps. lxxvi. We are not more holy than the devout St. Jerom, who, on recollecting eternity, struck his breast incessantly, to draw down upon him the mercy of God and avert the dreadful effects of his anger. We are not in a more elevated degree of godliness than so many solitaries and holy anchorites who, from the most sublime and rapturous contemplations, in which it would seem as if God had wrapt them up to the third heaven, descended in spirit from time to time to the bottom of hell, and lost themselves in the mighty gulf of eternity. Happy Arsenius! this was your occupation both day and night—it was this that made you pour forth uninterrupted floods of tears—it was this that made you offer up uninterrupted prayers to heaven—it was this that made you practise uninterrupted fasts and austerities. Happy, if we thought of it like you! we should speedily draw from it the same fruit.

2nd. For, if this motive be the most universal, I may add that it is also the most affecting. Nothing upon earth affects us more lively, or moves us more powerfully than pain and the notions we conceive of it. The edge of pleasure, in proportion as it lasts, is blunted; so that by too long continuance even pleasure as it is, it becomes insipid, palls upon the senses, and grows tiresome and inconvenient. But pain, on the contrary, how slight soever, far from diminishing, increases with time and is at last insupportable. Hence those terrors and frights arise with which we are seized, from a dread of misfortunes, to which we are exposed as well as others, and against which common prudence bids us take precaution. If the mind be but thoroughly possessed with the danger, the senses anticipate almost all the pangs it usually creates. Now if this be the case as to temporary evils, how much more so must it be as to evils that last for ever? If, therefore, I would manfully withstand the assaults of an impure passion which begins to rise in and corrupt my heart—if I would repress the propensity that unfortunately draws me towards certain objects, which I cannot avoid with too much care, and the contagion of which I am too well apprized of—if I am to renounce an attachment or criminal habit which tyrannizes over me, and to resist the violent attacks to which I am perpetually exposed—if I would rouse from a sluggish and faint-hearted inactivity which induces me to postpone and neglect my duty, and might insensibly allure me into vicious ways—if I

would reform my life, and be more exact, more fervent, more laborious, more mortified, notwithstanding the frequent revolts of corrupt nature and the conflicts I am necessitated to carry on against her—what should I then do? Collect all my attention and consider eternity an endless eternity of pain and woes. Struck with horror at so doleful a decree, I apply to this eternity all the powers of my mind; I examine and scrutinize it in all its parts; and I take, as it were, its whole dimensions. Moreover, to express it in more lively colours, and to represent it in my mind more conformably to the senses and the human understanding, I borrow comparisons from the fathers of the church, and I make, if I may so speak, the same computations. I behold in thought all the stars of the firmament; to this innumerable multitude I add all the drops of water collected together in the collections of the ocean—and if this be not enough I reckon, or at least endeavour to reckon, all the grains of sand it displays on its shore. Then I interrogate myself, I reason with myself, and I put myself the question—although I had for as many ages, and a thousand times as many undergone torments in that glowing fire which was kindled by the breath of the Lord in his anger to take eternal vengeance, would eternity be at an end? No: and why? Because it is eternity, and eternity is endless. To number up the stars that shine in the heavens, to count the drops of water that compose the sea, to tell the grains of sand that lie upon the shore is not absolutely impossible; but to measure in eternity the number of days, of years, of ages is what cannot be compassed, because the days, the years, and the ages are without number; or, to speak more properly, because in eternity there are neither days, nor years, nor ages, but a single, endless, infinite duration.

To this I adhere, with this is taken up my whole attention. I fancy I see, I fancy I rove through this same eternity, and discover no end, but find it to be always a boundless tract. I fancy the wide prospect lies open on all sides, and encompasseth me around; that if I rise up, or if I sink down, or what way soever I turn my eyes, this eternity meets them, and that after a thousand efforts to get forward I have made no progress, but find it still eternity—I fancy that after a long continuance of revolving time, I behold in the midst of this eternity a damned soul, in the same state, in the same affliction, in the same misery; and putting myself mentally in the place of this soul, I fancy that in this eternal punishment I

feel myself continually devoured by that fire which nothing extinguishes; that I continually shed those floods of tears which nothing can dry up; that I am continually gnawed by the worm of conscience, which never dies; that I continually express my despair and anguish by that gnashing of teeth and those lamentable outcries which never can move the compassion of God. This idea of myself, this representation amazes and terrifies me. My whole body shudders, I tremble with fear, I am filled with horror, I have the same feelings as the royal prophet, when he cried, "Pierce thou my flesh with thy fear, for I am afraid of thy judgments." Psal. cxviii. A happy disposition against all the assaults of the most dangerous temptations and all the charms of the most engaging pleasures! Seized in this manner with dread and apprehension, I am determined to undertake, to undergo, to practice whatever is prescribed by the laws of religion—for I conceive the necessity of it, and I conceive it by the dismal prospect of eternity; so that faith, by this prospect, and by the grace which accompanies it, exercises over me a kind of absolute sway. It keeps me in subjection to the most rigorous obligations of Christian justice; it encourages me to overcome all the difficulties I meet with, and therefore to offer myself salutary violence: it curbs all my passions, it directs and governs me, and makes me willingly and entirely submit to God.

But if it be urged that eternity is incomprehensible, and who can fear what he cannot comprehend? my answer is this, beloved Christians: this woful eternity is incomprehensible, it is true, but it is on that account the more to be dreaded. If I comprehend it I should fear it the less, because it would be limited, and I can comprehend nothing but what is limited. If I comprehended it, there would in its duration, as in my mind, be an assignable point without farther progression; and therefore I should feel not so terrifying a shock from it, because I might hope to arrive at this point, and should still have a resource in the state of damnation. But an evil so great as to be inconceivable strikes terror into all the faculties of my soul—a terror from which I can never recover. If it be an evil which I cannot conceive, therefore it is greater than all the evils which I conceive; and though I should conceive them all united together to afflict one person, and should comprehend them all, I should conclude they were all, though united together, infinitely short of that sovereign evil which I did not com-

prehend. And hence I should further draw this conclusion—a conclusion which is the necessary consequence of it—that although I were obliged to suffer all other evils, I should, without hesitation, nay with joy consent to such, to be rescued from an evil that cannot be equalled by all other evils. Now with how much greater reason ought I cheerfully submit to a slight penance, ought I to form a resolution of making some effort and sacrifice that is required of me, ought I to bear the restraint of spiritual exercises, the reasonableness and practicability of which are undeniable, in the view of reforming my whole conduct and leading a life conformable to the maxims of the Gospel?

Thus every man of true wisdom ought to reason who preserves in his heart any seeds of religion. Thus he will reason, thus infallibly conclude when futurity shall be the object of his serious reflection, and he shall sincerely follow the impulse arising from an intellectual view of an eternity of woes. But we conclude nothing, we aim at nothing, because we have only a vague and superficial remembrance of it from time to time. We think sufficiently, and oftentimes too much, of what may befal us during the course of years which we promise ourselves we shall run upon earth. We are but too attentive to the disappointments, mischances, crosses, accidents, and losses that may interrupt our designs and ruin our fortunes. We examine but too narrowly what may be our condition in the wane of life, and we are but too solicitous in taking precautions and concerting measures upon that account. We are so wholly taken up and our minds are so filled with this thought alone, that we are distracted with a thousand chimerical notions, and we are agitated with a thousand painful anxieties in order to prevent imaginary evils which a timorous forecast sets before our eyes. We live, nevertheless, in a profound forgetfulness of our eternal lot; we remain so, undisturbed; life glides on, and eternity approaches; and like those victims that went blindfold to the altar, on which their blood was shortly to reek, we blindly advance, and fall down the precipice. Alas! my brethren, are we Christians? are we men? If we be Christians, where is our faith? If we be men, where is our reason? When will you think of this direful eternity if you think not of it now? Will it be in eternity? Yes, you will think then of it, you will think of it to all eternity. But will it be then a time to think of it? And how will you think of it? What a torment will it be to think of it! What daggers will it

plant in your breast, and how you will reproach yourself that you did not sooner think of it! For this reason it is that we so often remind you of it; and I would it were in my power, for the reformation of men and the salvation of the world, at every hour of the day, and in every corner of the earth to resound this single word—ETERNITY! This alone were sufficient to operate the most extraordinary miracles of conversion.

Not only we think not of this woful eternity, but I know the progress that hath long been made through an excess of blindness, and is every day made by the licentiousness of the times, even so as to scoff at so profitable a thought; so as to hold in contempt the man who seems to be affected with it and would profit by it; so as to say to him in the most scandalous derision, "He is afraid of hell;" for such is the language of an infinity of libertines. Ah! beloved hearers, however you may rally I shall not be for that the less afraid of hell. I fear it, I own—and I would I were so happy as to transfuse my fear into all your breasts! I fear it sovereignly, I fear it constantly, and may it please kind heaven that I fear it efficaciously! I fear it sovereignly, inasmuch as my fear should be proportioned to its object; and as hell, which I fear, is the sovereign misfortune, if my fear were not sovereign, I should not fear it in the degree I ought to do. I shall fear it constantly; and to keep up this fear, I will be careful to renew it by incessant meditation, and by repeatedly exhibiting to my intellectual faculties the judgments of God. While I live in this world, I shall not know with certainty whether, before God, I deserve love or hatred—his eternal rewards or eternal vengeance. Though I had reason, relatively to the past and the present to enjoy tranquillity, and be easy in mind, I could never, in the midst of so many snares that surround me, and so many shocking falls of which the world hath been witness, answer to myself for my future conduct; and in this double incertitude my surest preservation will be vigilance and fear. In fine, one of the greatest favours I can obtain from heaven is, that my fear be efficacious; for there is a fruitless fear of hell as there is an unavailing desire of salvation. We fear and desire, or at least we believe that we fear and desire; but we are still unwilling that this fear and desire should cost us anything. A reprobated fear! By fearing, I should act, I should reform, I should advance, I should amend, I should omit nothing of whatever might conduce to ward off the blow with which I am threatened, and the misfortune into which I am afraid of falling.

These are my sentiments, and may they never, I pray God, be effaced from my mind! If, with the deist, this passes for weakness and superstitious timidity, I shall prefer my weakness to his supposed fortitude. He will laugh at my simplicity and I shall pity his folly, as he fears not that which so many have feared a thousand times more wise and more knowing than he is; his insensibility, as he is so preposterously incurious on so material a point, and concerns himself so little about that which is the greatest of all concerns; his rashness and audacity, as he exposes himself inconsiderately and without emotion to everlasting reprobation and finds no difficulty in running all hazards. If he steeled his heart to the charitable advice which I should give him on that head, and if notwithstanding the strongest remonstrances he persisted in his obduracy, I would abandon him and give him over to a reprobate sense, after the example of those angels that retired from Babylon, and turn my thoughts upon myself. I would lift up my hands to the God of heaven, and would prefer him my prayer in the words of the prophet: "Take not away my soul, O God, with the wicked." Ps. xxv. Save it by your mercy. Assist me in saving it myself by good works. It is spiritual, it is immortal, it is my only soul; and, O my God, should it once be lost—it is lost for ever.

Let us beware, beloved hearers, of so great a loss. We are all embarked, and each for himself, in this great affair—an affair that comes home to us, and regards us more nearly than any other. The success of it depends upon God and ourselves. God, on his part, will not be wanting to us; let us yield to his grace, and dispose ourselves, by a perfect observance of his commandments, to receive his glory in a blessed eternity.

SERMON XXXI.

ON THE REWARD OF THE SAINTS.

For the feast of All Saints.

Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for lo! your reward is very great in heaven. MATTH. v.

THESE words were spoken, beloved Christians, by the Son of God, by which he proposes heavenly glory to us, not merely as an inheritance we have a right to claim, but as a reward that must cost us some pains to deserve. He knew, says St. Chrysostom, how nearly it concerned us; and through a condescension worthy of so gracious a God, would draw us to his service by making our welfare to depend upon serving him: maintaining his right, and making no abatement in his absolute command—that we love him as our God, for his own sake, and more than ourselves—he is willing that our love should have an eye to self; and, provided that the regard to our own interest be not servile and unfilial, he consents that we love him on our own account; or, rather, that we find our account in loving him. For, to this end, he promises a reward, the sole contemplation of which is sufficient to raise us to that pure and perfect love which unites our interest, as St. Chrysostom adds, holily and divinely with that of heaven.

Wherefore, Christians let us enter into the meaning of our Saviour's words, and without attempting a more sublime degree of spirituality than hath been taught us already by that adorable Master, let us be attentive only to the reward which he promises, and to which he bids us aspire, when he says "Our reward is very great in heaven." That it is in our power, and that we ought to merit it, is an article of faith which I here lay down as a settled principle that cannot, without blasphemy, be called in question; and I mean to show, supposing this principle, how deserving it is of our wishes and our care. In order to impel you the more strongly to the pursuit and attainment of it, I shall endeavour to demonstrate its excellence and advantage: by contrasting it with the rewards which this world affords, I would fain make you relish it, and stir you up by that means to a zeal of acquiring it.

Now that this may appear in the clearest light, I need only adhere to the words of my text, the literal exposition of which will unfold my whole design: "Lo your reward is very great in heaven." A certain reward, which God hath prepared for his own elect, and of which you cannot fail, if you seek it with candour and a willing mind: "Lo! your reward." A plentiful reward, which hath no other measure than the immensity of God, and which alone will complete the extent of your desires: "Lo! your reward is very great." In fine, an eternal reward which you will never lose, being reserved for you in heaven, where there is no apprehension of change or revolution: "Lo! your reward is very great in heaven." Fit qualities these to make on your minds a lasting impression; especially if you judge by a comparative view of them with the rewards of this life: that is, by the three essential differences, which I beseech you to observe, between worldly rewards and the rewards allotted to the elect of God; for to me it appeared that nothing could more effectually engage your attention or awaken your faith. First, the reward of the elect is certain; but worldly rewards are doubtful and uncertain. Secondly, the reward of the elect is plentiful; but worldly rewards are empty and defective. Thirdly, the reward of the elect is eternal; but worldly rewards are frail and perishable.

These are three motives of comfort and joy which the church proposes, by laying before our eyes the glory of the saints, and exciting us thereby to imitate their sanctity. "Rejoice and be exceeding glad." If you conform to their example, rejoice, inasmuch as you will be certainly, plentifully, and eternally rewarded. On the other hand, weep and be sorely afflicted, if, notwithstanding so many and so great advantages, enamoured with this life you feel within yourself neither relish nor inclination for the reward of the saints. Not only weep, but tremble for fear, if your hardness of heart makes you incurious and insensible to such affecting truths.

Give me, O Lord, the necessary grace to handle worthily and profitably so great a subject, and make those who hear me, being penetrated with the virtue of your divine word, conceive in their hearts an ardent desire, a lively hope, a holy foretaste of the good things which you design them. Make them, with that view, disengage themselves from creatures, think only of futurity, quit the paths of vanity, and seek nothing but truth. Make them, like

your saints, as being hereafter to partake of your heavenly glory, overthrow the ill maxims and practices of the world.

PART I. To toil and strive, oftentimes at the expense of health and happiness, for a doubtful acquisition which it is hard to come at, and perhaps in the end be unjustly disappointed is the usual fate of worldly-minded persons. On the other side, to be at pains for a certain reward, and to serve a master who neither can nor will overlook merit is the peculiar happiness of God's elect and the predestinated saints. They served a God faithful to his promise, and they had a reward in view that could never fail. This enabled them, as St. Chrysostom observes, to undertake every thing, and to undergo every thing. I suffer, says one of them, filled with that heroical and superior force, which so comfortable a truth is wont to inspire, it is St. Paul: "I suffer but am not confounded." 2 Tim. i. Far from being afflicted at, I glory in my sufferings, "Because I know whom I have believed, and am sure he is able to keep that which I have deposited with him unto that day" (2 Tim. i.), when all shall be rewarded according to their works. What understands he by that which he hath deposited? The store of merit which he had taken such care to lay up in heaven: that is, what he had done and suffered for the Almighty, in hopes of that glory with which his labours, he was fully convinced, would at length be rewarded. It is the literal sense of this passage: "I have fought a good fight (says he in the same epistle to Timothy), I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. For the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just judge, will render to me at that day." 2 Tim. i. Thus spoke the apostle; and thus every Christian hath a right to speak after him, as he owns himself that the crown of justice was not reserved for him in particular, but in general and without exception, for all God's servants. "Not only to me, but to them also that love his coming." 2 Tim. i.

Thus we ought all of us, beloved hearers, to proceed rationally, making a personal application of these words to ourselves: "I know whom I have believed;" and this is the important mystery of religion, on which should be hinged our whole conduct in life with regard to God. Whether or not I shall ever be so happy as to deserve the reward which God hath prepared for those who love him I know not; but I know that if I deserve it, I shall infallibly obtain it: I know that in the degree I shall deserve it I shall pos-

sess it; I know that whatever I do or suffer for righteousness sake is a sacred deposit which God lays up for me, for which in his goodness he is willing to be answerable, and which it is impossible should be lost in his hands. "I know whom I have believed"—that is, I am not sure of myself, but I am sure of God, in whose service I labour; I am sure of his goodness, his faithfulness, his power; and I am encouraged and animated by the security I receive from these his attributes. This it was that supported the zeal of those blessed spirits who now reign in heaven after sanctifying the earth with their virtues. They depended on God and made sure of all those things which they expected from his bountiful hand. Not only they hoped in him, but they infallibly knew that hoping in him they should not be confounded.

It is not in the power of the worldly man to hold this language with regard to the world and worldly rewards. As his judgment rests on the testimony he bears to his own conduct, he may say on the contrary, lamenting his fate: I know I have performed every point of my duty with respect to the world—but I know not whether the world will make me proper amends; I know not how far it will acknowledge my service; I know not whether my service be acceptable to it. Concerning the rewards which this life affords, he may say without presumption: I am sure of myself but I am not sure of those who have it in their power to distribute favours; I am not sure of meeting with their friendly disposition; I am not sure but their views may be fraught with iniquity. He may say in a sense directly contrary to that of St. Paul, speaking of the world: "I know whom I have believed." I know, and but too well, what the world is, that world to which I am unfortunately wedded; that world in which I obstinately confide. And for that reason, having been long in its service, I am still in uncertainty, because fatal experience hath taught me and convinced me, against my will, that I neither could nor should have put any trust in so treacherous a world. Now to be destitute of certainty, to have nothing to depend on, is a mortification to the worldling, a grievous affliction; and if eagerness and vivacity ever so little actuate his ambition, he falls into agonies and pangs of despair. Such is the first difference which I proposed to observe between the rewards of God and the those of the world. But let us examine it to the bottom, and come to particulars, as nothing can more powerfully incline us to adore the mercies of our God, or excite in our hearts

that love and fervour, which are the necessary means of acquiring holiness.

There are in the world unfruitful merits, and the reasons for it are given by St. Chrysostom—because there are merits unknown to men; because there are merits, which, though known to men, are displeasing to them; because there are merits which indeed men esteem, and with which they are affected, but which they cannot reward for want of ability. Three causes of the incertitude of worldly rewards, which show at the same time the certainty and infallibility of the reward prepared for the elect of God.

1st. Merits unknown to men, how much merit by this alone is lost to the world? how much destroyed by unfriendly offices? how much stifled and annihilated in the crowd? To pursue this induction would be an endless task. No such treatment is apprehended from God, Of what nature soever the merit may be, which we acquire in his presence, he knows, distinguishes, and clearly discerns it; he considers it maturely; he preserves the remembrance of it; and keeps it always in view.

By the living light of his divine understanding, he discovers merit of every kind, whether obscure or shining, hidden or applauded. How many saints are there now in heaven, who never appeared to be what they were, and whose sanctity though perfect gained them no admiration while they lived upon earth?

As the searcher of hearts, God seeks for merit to the very bottom, which is the heart. This merit of the heart unknown to men, is known to him, entirely known. Hence it is, that he requitest us not only for our actions and works, but for our intentions and desires; not only for what we do, suffer, or relinquish, but the will to do, suffer, or relinquish, for his sake. Thus, according to the Scripture phrase, he hears, and by the same rule recompenses even the preparations of the heart: "The preparations of the heart thy ear hath heard." Ps. ix. That is, he is pleased, if we have the will to please him; and if he is pleased he will load us with favours. What number of the predestinate had, in the sight of God, the merit only of good will! As he is a God of infinite penetration, whose unlimited knowledge nothing can escape, the most insignificant of our actions, provided it be performed with a view to serve him, will not be void of its price and value. A cup of water, as himself assures us, merits special glory. The widow's two mites received equal praise from the mouth of our

Saviour with the magnificent offerings that were made in the temple.

As he is sovereignly and strictly just, for every degree of merit and holiness which we acquire, he hath ordained, in proportion, beatitude and glory. And it is the proportion of these degrees that constitutes for the saints, as well as for the angels, the admirable order of the heavenly hierarchies. On earth, the greatest merit is not always the best rewarded. Moderate qualifications, through the incapacity, or incompetency, or malignity of man, oftentimes prevail; but in heaven, merit and glory keep equal pace. It is a God that regulates the one by the other; a God incapable of deceiving, incapable of being imposed upon, incapable of esteeming aught but what is estimable, namely, piety and pious deeds.

Merit in the world of every sort is effaced by time. Whatever we do for the honour of God, the moment we have done it, it is instantly written down in indelible characters in the book of life. Men not only forget, but are willing to forget the services we do them; and God himself declares to us, that our services are locked up in the treasures of his mercy. He tells us in express terms "that our sacrifices are always before his eyes" (Ps. xlix.), and that our "Prayers and alms deeds ascend to heaven in his sight, and are held in remembrance." Acts. x. No, he can no more be forgetful of our good works than he can be that he is our God, or that we are his creatures. Do we believe all this? If we do not believe it, we know not the master whom we pretend to serve; or, if we believe it, why all this tepidity and negligence in his service?

2nd. Add to this, in order that you may have a better relish for the happiness of the saints which I have laid down in the second place as an original cause of human misfortunes, and of the uncertainty attending the rewards of this life, namely—that there is known merit, but displeasing to men. And tell me, what is there in the world more common? How often, by such means, do we see among men, unfortunate, discarded, and, if I may venture so to express myself, reprobated merit, which by change of affection, or clashing of interests, instead of love and benevolence, causes jealousy and hatred? They who take pains to act meritoriously in the presence of God are not liable to this. As God hates sin, and by an unalterable consequence, cannot but hate it; so he cannot but love the merit of good works, and crown it with glory. There are in the elect, different kinds of sanctity; but all, says St. Chrys-

ostom, are pleasing to him, as they are so many emanations from the original sanctity, which is himself, and are his own work and his own gift. To have merit in the world, to have conspicuous merit, is oftentimes a bar to places and employments, originally designed as the reward of merit. With God, the more merit the more love. Now to be beloved of God, whose love is essentially the happiness of the blessed, the predestinate, and the saints, is to be already rewarded.

3rd. In fine, however just and grateful, however liberal and magnificent, men may be, it is not always in their power to reward deserts; deserts, which they sincerely acknowledge, and with which they are affected; deserts, which, in number and quality, exceed all the favours, though great and numerous, that are at their disposal; deserts, which, notwithstanding their esteem, are inconvenient and irksome. The case is quite different with Almighty God. Forasmuch as there are no bounds to his magnificence, which is inseparable from his omnipotence, though our merit should fructify ever so long, it is never exhausted. The more we have of it, the greater treasures of grace and glory hath he to bestow on us. "He is rich," says St. Paul, "for all that invoke him." Rom. x. St. Bernard goes on: "and more so for all that serve him faithfully." As we may pray repeatedly, but never importunately, so we cannot be troublesome by multiplying our merits.

We may then rely on him; and when we labour for him, in hopes of that glory which the saints enjoy, sinners as we are, we have this consolation that we say with St. Paul, "Hope bringeth not shame." Rom. v. All other hope is deceitful, but this is not. A hundred times I might justly have repented of having trusted to and conceived too sanguine expectations of mankind—but I dare not say, much less complain, that ever my gracious God abandoned me; and were I so ungrateful as to entertain the thought, not his justice only but his very mercy would rise up against me in his behalf.

I am sure of my God—an adorable principle! whence the royal prophet drew those holy and edifying conclusions on which a Christian, especially at court, ought seriously to meditate all the days of his life: "It is good to confide in the Lord, rather than in man; it is good to trust in the Lord, rather than in princes." Ps. cxvii. It was a king that said it, and he in whose presence I now speak

is too religious not to give assent to so divine a testimony. I am sure of my God—an affecting principle! capable, of itself, to make my life happy. My hope, so far as it relates to God, can give me no dismay. It is true I may, by my presumption, abuse it, and make it a void, and unavailing. But as it is infallible with respect to God, provided that on my side there be no deficiency, I have an undoubted right to expect everything from his bountiful hand.

Are we not then inexcusable, beloved Christians, what do I say? are we not unworthy of the protection of God, if we act not openly by him; if we are afraid of doing too much for him; if we serve him in a manner unsuitable to the Deity? Forbid it heaven, that I should blame what I cannot sufficiently extol, your desire of deserving the favour of your sovereign, whom the Almighty in his wisdom hath appointed to rule over us, and commanded us to obey. But I could wish that your services were more holy, and more conformable to the spirit of the Gospel. On him, in this world, your fate and fortune depend; and I agree that your attachment to his person and service may very lawfully arise from interest in conjunction with duty. He is the image of God. Under God, your confidence cannot be better placed. But if such be your eagerness in the pursuit of rewards, the failure of which you have reason to apprehend, how can you palliate the supine negligence in which you slumber, concerning the reward for which you have the promise and surety of a God? What answer will you make, when seated on his judgment-seat, he shall reproach you with so monstrous and criminal a forgetfulness? This, however, is your crime; which, if you bewailed not, I might justly pronounce those tremendous words thundered out by the prophet: "Cursed is the man who trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm" (Jerem. xvii.); and still more cursed, if, having trusted in man, he cannot persuade himself to rely on God. This will better appear from the second quality of the recompense which is promised to the saints. That it is not only certain and infallible, but plentiful and abundant. "Behold your reward is great," which I proposed for the subject of the second part.

Part II. In order to make you take my meaning the more clearly, give me leave to premise that by a plentiful and abundant reward I mean a reward which surpasses, or at least which equals the services we have performed, or endeavoured to perform in hopes of attaining it. This is the first notion which St. Jerom

gives of it, when he applies to the blessed what our Saviour in the Gospel promised to the righteous, with a view to excite them to fervour by the motive of Christian hope: "Good measure, and pressed down, and shaken together and running over, shall they give into your bosom." Luke vi. In fact, it is in the persons, or rather in the state of the glorified saints, that this promise of our Saviour is accomplished to the letter. But to consider the matter in a more moral sense, and of course more suitable to the present subject—I call a plentiful and abundant reward, a reward of itself capable to satisfy the heart of man; capable to fill up the vacancy in his heart and the extent of his desires; capable to make him completely happy and thoroughly satisfied: and it is thus that St. Ambrose understands it in his "Exposition of the Evangelical Beatitudes." Now in both the one sense and the other, the Son of God alone hath an absolute right to tell us what he tells us in such explicit terms, "Lo! your reward is very great," because he alone hath the power of conferring rewards on men which have the two properties I have just mentioned; or, in other words, because the reward only of God's elect can be looked upon, relatively to these two properties, as plentiful and and abundant.

1st. For is it not true (I begin by the first of these two characteristics, and for this appeal, without farther proof to your own experience. Give ear to what I say, and ruminate upon it) is it not true that whoever would attempt to make his way in the world must submit, if he would not deceive himself, to be at great pains to gain a little? And is it not, on the contrary, evident and incontestable that by labouring for God, how little soever, we gain immensely. Let this parallel be of advantage to us, an inducement to relish the precepts of religion.

What do not people undergo daily for the favours of the world, which that same world is privileged to dispose of at a dear rate; favours which they ardently desire, expect with impatience, obtain with trouble, and which, when possessed, fall infinitely short of the pains they cost? How they drudge and slave to get into an office by which they expect considerable advantages, but of which the attainment too soon undeceives them and gives them disgust! What will they not do at the hazard of their lives, in pursuit of fame, an airy phantom, of which, when enjoyed, they clearly perceive the vanity and emptiness? With what eagerness and emotion do they aspire to the favour of the great and powerful, cringing and

glozing, and meanly sacrificing their repose and liberty, which mostly but answers some paltry end? To how many Christians all over the world might I say with reason what God said heretofore by his prophet to the Israelites, suggesting the horrid and inevitable consequences of their infidelity: "You have sowed much and brought in little." That is, you have given yourselves uneasiness, you have made great efforts, you have fawned and paid court to a degree of meanness—and all this terminates in a wretched fortune that falls far short of, and utterly defeats, your high expectations; because, toiling for the world, you have sown in a soil incapable of producing a plentiful harvest. "You have sowed much and brought in little." It would take up no less than a whole discourse to expatiate fully upon this topic; a topic which perhaps you would understand but too well, and by the ill use which you would probably turn it to, might serve as a pretext to authorize your vexation at past disappointments and groundless and unjust complaints of the world. I resume my comparison.

Very different was the lot of the saints, the elect of God. They suffered, I own, by labouring for him, and led an austere, penitential, mortified life; but in the midst of their austerity, penitence, and mortification, they could say with the apostle: "The sufferings of this time are not to be set in balance with the glory to come which shall be revealed in us." Rom. viii. We suffer, it is true—but besides our suffering for justice sake, which is itself no small reward—besides our suffering for Almighty God, which is itself an anticipated bliss—all our sufferings bear no proportion to the heavenly glory which is prepared for us, and the least degree of which will make ample amends for the hardships which we endure in the way of the Lord.

It is in this that the happiness of the saints consists. The Scripture informs us that they walked in the spirit of salutary compunction, and in tears sowed the precious seeds of their merits: "They went, and wept, casting their seeds." Ps. cxxv. But they reflected with comfort, that, returning soon triumphant and filled with joy, they should gather and bring with them an abundant harvest—that is, immense treasures of glory, the price of the small sacrifices they made to Almighty God: "They shall return with joy, bringing home their harvest." Ps. cxxv. In patience and longanimity they possessed their souls, and founded their hopes in the promise of our Saviour: "Since thou hast been faithful over a few

things, I will appoint thee over many: enter into the joy of thy Lord." Matth. xxv. Thus the contemplation of that heavenly glory which the saints enjoy should animate and inspire us. I serve a God faithful to his promises, in his requitals bountiful—a God that recompenses like a God; a God that, even in this life, repays my services a hundred fold by the consolation I feel in having done my duty; and this I mention as the second notion of a plentiful reward.

2nd. I say then, with St. Augustin, that no other, alone, is sufficient to satisfy the heart of man; and I add, that this characteristic was suitable only to the reward of the saints. Need so palpable a truth be supported by argument? Is it not in some measure capable of impelling us, whether we will or not, to seek the kingdom of God? True it is, some are rewarded in this world beyond their services and deserts, beyond their own most sanguine hopes; but are they therefore content? Do you see any such? have you seen any such? do you ever expect to see any such? And if not what good purpose can their rewards answer? They wallow in riches and are cloyed with honours, and it would seem as though the world and every thing in it made a point of raising them and completing their prosperity—but is their heart satisfied? Do not they pant after more? Do they think themselves happy? Even in their prosperity and height of good fortune, do they in reality, and not merely in appearance, enjoy felicity? On the contrary, says St. Chrysostom, is it not in those stations that happiness is most rare, or rather impossible? Are not fortunes always attended with great vexations? What vast numbers, by accumulating wealth, have become more and more unhappy, and have felt more piercing stings of sorrow! The world, however, failed in no point to satisfy their ambition, and load them with its favours, but with those favours it mixed the seeds of bitterness, which are inseparable from them, and which produce plentifully heart-corroding cares. The world, by making them powerful and opulent, conferred on them every thing within its own precincts, but could not bestow that plenitude of happiness without which neither power nor opulence can fence off the afflictions peculiar to their state. However happy they appeared to be, much was still wanting to make them so effectually. You will tell me that the fault must be ascribed to themselves, as they were only unhappy because they were insatiable. But I answer—why, notwithstanding the smiles

of fortune, were they still insatiable, but because, as St. Chrysostom wisely remarks, it is an undoubted, constant, eternal truth, that the favours of this world, how extraordinary soever we may think them to be, are inadequate to the desires of the human heart.

But be that as it may, beloved Christians, I infer from thence the excellence and perfection of the reward predestined to God's elect. It will fill, as we learn by the rules of religion, the immensity of our hearts; it will satisfy the boundless extent of our desires; it will be a consummate beatitude, being deficient in no part. n a word, insatiable as we are, we shall be replenished with delight, immersed in a perpetual flood of joy, and thoroughly content. "I shall be satisfied," says the man after God's own heart, "When thy glory shall appear." Ps. xvi. As who should say—till then, O Lord, though the world should smile on me, I shall hunger and thirst; tired out and disgusted with my present state I shall wish for another; my heart, destitute of solid enjoyments, and full of vain desires, is in trouble and agitation; but a calm and tranquillity, when I shall participate of your heavenly glory, will ensue. I shall feel no longer the thirst of avarice that burns me up, nor the cruel hunger of that secret ambition which inwardly consumes me. My desires will cease, because I shall find, in the fruition of thy glory, a completion of happiness, repose, and joy. Guarded against evils of every sort, and confirmed in the possession of all that is good, "I shall be satisfied when thy glory shall appear."

Thus spoke the inspired king. Was it exaggeration or the effect of extatic transport? No, Christians, his words proceeded from his inward feelings and a secret impulse. Neither is it surprising that, affected with the truth of the present subject, he made use of so significant an expression as this: "I shall be satisfied." He knew that the glory and reward of the righteous, after which he sighed, was God himself; God, who said to Abraham, I am thy reward exceeding great—I myself, who am thy lord and thy master. Nothing beside myself could content thee, as all my glory, without myself, would be insufficient to satisfy the unbounded desires of thy heart. Myself was necessary to make thee happy, and therefore I promise thee no other reward—I am thy reward: and no more, beloved hearers, is meant by that incomprehensible felicity which the saints will enjoy in the heavenly mansions. They will possess God, they will be replenished with him—"They shall be inebriated," says David, "with the plenty of thy house, and

thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of thy pleasure." Ps. xxxv. And he immediately subjoins this convincing reason: "Because with thee is the fountain of life." Ps. xxv. This, beloved Christians, will be your future lot; this, in the midst of the miseries which oppress us in this valley of tears, is what we believe and what we hope. But being rendered dim-sighted by flesh and blood I doubt we comprehend it but by halves. And perhaps you, to whom I address myself, may require that your faith be supported and strengthened on this head by a farther elucidation, that will bring the thing home to each one's breast. Well, then, as a minister of the word, I will endeavour in this to conform to your weakness.

You wish me to illustrate the doctrine of faith, relatively to all that I have been saying, by a particular instance. That I shall readily do. All that I have been saying will not only be fulfilled hereafter in heaven, but is actually fulfilled in the righteous upon earth. "Behold your reward is great;" an evident proof that the elect of God will be thoroughly replenished with the possession of him is, that even in this life we see men, who through a spirit of religion bid adieu to every earthly enjoyment, and place their whole happiness in the possession of their Creator. To say nothing of the glorified saints in heaven, we see saints upon earth who enjoy in some sort the same happiness. There are but few, I must needs own, in this sublime degree of perfection; but there are a few, and some possibly of your acquaintance—men disengaged from the world, who have quitted all for God, and find all in God; men satisfied with their God, who say with holy David: "Besides thee, what do I desire upon earth." Ps. lxxii. Or even who outgo holy David, and might say, not like him, "I shall be satisfied," but am actually satisfied with the foretaste you give me of your heavenly bliss. Yes, there are such examples, which the Almighty is pleased for our edification or confusion to set before our eyes.

This, notwithstanding the iniquity of the times, is what the grace of Jesus Christ works frequently in the hearts of fervent Christians—Christians who live up to the precepts of the Gospel, and sanctify the earth with meritorious deeds. We see no worldlings content with the world, but the servants of God are content with God. What more is requisite to awaken our zeal? The rich man is never content with his riches, but many are content with evangelical poverty. The ambitious man is never content with his for-

tune, but many are humble and content with humiliation. The sensual man is never content with his pleasures, but many are dead and crucified to the world, and thoroughly content with austerities and crosses. In a word, those beatitudes of our Saviour Jesus Christ, however paradoxical and incredible they may seem, are palpably made appear and authentically verified; I mean there are men who for heaven's sake, and from a vehement desire of pleasing God, are happy to suffer, to weep, to possess nothing, as, notwithstanding all that, they possess God; while the world with all its prosperity and false joy can neither be happy nor content. Can anything be opposed to so evident a demonstration?

To partake of the divinity and have God for reward is an advantageous lot, the lot only of those who seek him with candour and a pure intention. Shall I say it, and may I give attestation in my own case? Sinner as I am, an unworthy sinner, my merciful God by the influence of his grace hath many times soothed and "enlarged my heart." Ps. cx. How often, O Lord, have I tasted with delight and in great abundance those heavenly consolations of which you are the origin, and which are upon earth an anticipated paradise? How often, taken up with yourself only, have I heartily despised all sublunary things and deemed the world as naught? Vain, fleeting pleasures you banished from my heart, and lest it should regret them, you took yourself their place. Hence the privation of them was more delicious than had ever been the enjoyment or could ever have been. Now if in this place of banishment and misery, where I cannot behold you but through the darksome clouds of faith, you fill my heart already, how will it be in that blessed country in which I shall see you face to face? If in virtue of having dedicated, by a solemn profession, myself and my labours to your divine majesty when I renounced the world, I am already enriched with your holy poverty, how will it be when I shall possess the riches of your heavenly abodes? If it be so very good to suffer for your sake even a short time, what must it be to live and reign with you for endless ages? And what shall I be in the participation of your glory, since it is so honourable and comfortable to partake of your humiliations? That this reward is certain, that it is also plentiful hath now been shown, I shall proceed to expatiate on its eternal duration, with which I shall conclude.

Part III. To enter the lists like the champions of old, and after their example to run the course which lies open to us, and to

run in such a manner as to obtain the prize, is, according to St. Paul, that which we are called to and that which the saints have practised before us. Now these champions, says this great apostle, to be unrestrained in the race and unincumbered in the fight stripped off everything; by which we are taught to be disengaged from the things of this life. "Every one that striveth for the mastery refraineth from all things." 1 Cor. ix. The difference, continues he, between them and us is, that they follow this practice and submit to the severity of the rules prescribed them in order to obtain a corruptible crown. An essential difference, that should make us blush if we do not take care, and watch not every opportunity of imitating their example. "And they indeed that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible one." 1 Cor. ix. This, beloved hearers, is the third and last motive which inspired the saints with resolution and courage, and perfectly disengaged them from the enjoyments of life: the immortality, the eternity, the incorruptibility of the crown which was reserved for them in heaven, compared with the instability, the frailty, and the short duration of earthly fruitions.

And to pursue a parallel so copious, and so abounding in edifying matter and important documents, and which the apostle hath made use of to so good purpose, all earthly recompenses are fleeting and perishable. As such, not only they will perish but do continually perish and vanish from our sight. How many have you and I seen perish? Of how many fortunes, raised on this foundation, on these supposed recompenses, do we see at this day but the melancholy ruins? How often, since you became spectators and witnesses to the revolutions of the world and the great scenes of life, might you not have said in the language of the prophet—I have seen that man of the world raised high like the cedars of "Lebanon, and I passed by, and lo! he was not; I sought, and his place was not found." Ps. xxxvi. Are we not furnished with similar examples by daily experience? Which of those distinguished favourites of fortune, whose exalted stations put them, to all appearance, beyond the reach of danger, hath the confidence to be assured of permanent happiness and uninterrupted prosperity? Who dares to affirm that he who is now in the zenith of his glory is not ready to fall, and to show by his fall that the world hath nothing in it lasting for its followers, much less eternal? Without waiting for death, where all must terminate, are not its smiles and

favours changed frequently, and suddenly too, into disappointment and sorrow?

Now this it would seem, beloved Christians, were sufficient of itself to wean your affections from them, and prevail with you to seek, steadily and efficaciously, the reward of the righteous and elect of God. The instability of wealth, the difficulty of preserving it, the danger and fear of losing it, the despair and affliction consequent to the loss of it, the many vexations and inevitable miscarriages to which those are always exposed who possess it, should induce the worldling to turn his thoughts to a much more solid and lasting happiness.

Admonitions would be needless, were people but frequently to make these reflections; nor would the divine word be absolutely necessary in order to expel the poison of ambition that worries them to death. Convinced on this head of their false maxims, and ill-judged proceedings, they would receive more light from their own hearts, and from a secret consciousness than it is possible for me to impart by words. If those whom we have known to be the most vehemently desirous of worldly rewards, could have foreseen events, and how soon the fortunes, which they always regarded as the fruit of their industry, would be ruined and dissipated; if the term of duration could have been clearly ascertained; if by telling them peremptorily, you will enjoy all this, and all this will last only a few years which you have still to live, they could have been made to see their folly and extravagance, alas! my brethren, they would never have beeni nfluenced by that dangerous passion, that destructive temptation, the desire of preferment and advancing in the world; nay more, they could never have brought themselves to do what they did, nor to take so much pains, for so very little. Let us deplore their infatuation and turn it to advantage. They were swayed by ambition, because they never reflected seriously on the narrowness of the boundaries by which those supposed great fortunes were circumscribed; and they made interest with such assiduity for earthly acquisitions, because they were unwilling to ponder with attention on their short duration, but were desirous of forgetting it, and used all their endeavours to put the very thoughts of it out of their minds. If they had, insensible to these rewards, considered the end and consequence of them, they would not have made use of them otherwise than according to St. Paul's maxim, that is, as if they made no use of them, because this

would have incessantly run in their minds, that the world passes away, and worldly rewards along with it. "The world passes away, and the concupiscence thereof." 1 John ii.

Far different is the case of the righteous man, who, as the wiseman says, "shall live for evermore, and his reward is with the Lord" (Wisd. v.); an unchangable, invariable, unalterable, reward; a reward that will consist in the happiness of seeing, loving, and possessing God eternally. As the torment of the damned will be, to be deprived of God for ever, and for ever to feel the privation of him, the beatitude of the saints will be, to be for ever certain of not losing him, and to be united with him to all eternity. A kingdom is prepared for them, an eternal kingdom, a kingdom in no danger of succession or revolution. A crown is prepared for them, the property of which, incommunicable to other crowns, is to be everlasting. They will reign, but their reign, like that of God, will be without end. They will be filled with joy, an uninterrupted joy, a joy that will last while God exists. They will share in his glory, a glory that will never diminish or fade, but will be always fresh, will for ever continue, and the splendour of which will by continuance perpetually increase.

Without insisting on that essentially beatifying glory which the saints enjoy in heaven, we may perceive some rays of it in the honour which is paid to them by the church upon earth; an honour, which may be accounted, in some shape, eternal. To the end of ages will the faithful celebrate in the church of God the victories and triumphs of those glorious champions. To the end of ages the church militant will canonize them, by publishing their merit, conversion, virtue, fervour, and austerity. Their festivals were instituted for that purpose; and their great achievements for the service of God are annually solemnized, that from age to age, from generation to generation, they may be held in remembrance. While the church of Christ shall last (and the gates of hell shall not avail against her) this respect and honour will subsist, and be paid to the saints. This I call a ray of the eternity of their glory, and as it were an anticipation of the eternity of their reward. The glory of worldlings, like worldlings themselves, dies away by degrees: both are buried at the same time, the one in oblivion, the other in the grave. They may have acquired in their lifetime applause and acclamations; but "their memory" says David, "hath perished with a noise." Ps. xi. How many heroes, the

admiration heretofore of mankind, are no longer spoken of, no longer thought of! Their glory, which was temporary, vanished like smoke, but that of the saints shall last for ever. Their memory for endless ages shall be held in veneration: "The righteous man shall be in everlasting remembrance." Ps. xi. Eternally, O God, your friends will be honoured, because, being your friends, by indefeasible connexion, they will everlastingly be deserving of the honour we pay them, and of infinitely more than we are able to pay them. "Thy friends, O God, are made exceeding honourable." Ps. cxxxvi.

A precious reward! Is it possible we should hold it in sufficient esteem? If we be really Christians, ought not our hearts to teem with consolation at the thoughts of that which our God hath prepared for us in heaven? but wo be to us, if our reward be confined to this transitory life, and we be numbered among those who "Have received their reward." Matth. vi. Wo be to us, if our names, instead of being written in heaven, be written in the earth; since to be written in the earth, according to the prophet, implies malediction: "O Lord, all that forsake thee shall be confounded; they that depart from thee shall be written in the earth." Jerem. xvii. Though we were, on the contrary, the most wretched, the most debased of all mankind, if we be in God's grace and spotless in his sight, let us rejoice that our names art written in heaven: and let us not forget that one of the most certain signs of it is, to be tried in this life by afflictions and crosses. "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Luke x. However we may languish under the pressure and weight of pains and sufferings, let us ever have recourse to the method by which St. Paul was supported under grievous calamities; and let us apply to ourselves the elevated sentiments with which he was penetrated, when he said: "Our tribulation, which at present is momentary and light, worketh in us above measure an exceeding and eternal weight of glory." 2 Cor. iv. That is, the sickness with which it hath pleased God to visit me, the injustice which distresses me, the ill office which is done me, the persecution raised against me, the loss of my estate, which the misfortune of the times hath brought upon me (for all this, according to the apostle, is but light and momentary) will produce in me an eternal weight of glory. You desire to have an urgent, moving, prevalent inducement to Christian patience. But was it possible to produce one, with all those qualities, in a more

eminent degree, than the eternity of glory which is the reward of the elect.

Thus the blessed saints triumphed over the world; thus were they in the midst of multiplied conflicts, unshaken and invincible; thus, says St. Paul, they surmounted torments, fire and faggot, and every thing the most terrible and cruel in death. It is this that upholds them at this day, oppressed under the heavy weight of trials, by which God displays their constancy and fidelity.—They suffer all, says the sacred text, not only with patience but with joy, because "Their hope is full of [the promised] immortality." Wisd. iii. Why shudder we at the thoughts of following their example? Have we as fierce engagments to go through as they had? have we resisted like them to the shedding of our blood? Why then are we so dastardly? How comes it that we degenerate from the severe virtue of those glorious saints who are proposed to us as patterns? Why do we betray so much sloth and weakness on sundry occasions, on which their example should inspire us with fortitude, and make us gain victories over corrupt nature? Because we consider in a different light, from what they did, that glorious immortality to which they aspired, and the hope of which encouraged and impelled them through every obstacle.

How melancholy and unfortunate doth the difference appear between them and us! Let there be no more of it, but let us join to their example, which God proposes to us, the same reasons which influenced their conduct; and let us like them gather strength and holiness by lively hopes of a blissful hereafter. Otherwise, Christians, in vain do we celebrate with the universal Church the festivals of the saints. In vain presuming on the disposition of the Almighty to grant their request, do we implore their intercession. St. Augustin tells us, that to practice what we solemnize, and make the object of our reverence the rule of our lives, is an epitome of religion. The prospect of glory disengaged their affections from created things, and should produce in us the same effect. Convinced of immortality by scriptural documents, they attained to godliness; and we, conducted by the same guide, ought to walk in their footsteps.

This, O all ye predestinated saints, whose glorious memory we honour this day, we humbly ask and beseech you to ask of the Father of Mercies. What we now are, you once have been, and what you now are, we hope one day to be. You have felt our

wretchedness, and we pant after your blessedness. Though sinners, we are your brethren. Though at a distance we are united with you by the greatest intimacy and freest intercourse, the communion of saints. Though inhabitants of the earth, yet as true believers we "are not strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and the domestics of God." Ephes. ii. Though distressed and sorrowful in this valley of tears, yet we claim a right, as the sons of God, to be your joint heirs, and "joint heirs with Jesus Christ." Rom. viii. Look down upon us as invested with these titles, and therefore objects not unworthy of your charity. Look down upon us as those who are to fill up the number of the elect, and in the sanctification of whom your wishes will henceforward be concentrated. Lend a favourable ear to our humble petitions, and present them to the Deity, who is pleased to hearken to you, and whose throne you surround. Take us under your protection, and exert your zeal and love in our behalf. Be our patrons and intercessors, as we are your imitators. Enjoy your happiness, but be not forgetful of our wants and indigence.

They remember us, Christians, they remember us and think of us. Their zeal for our good, according to St. Cyprian, is equal to their tranquillity in their own regard; and as they are certain of their own happiness, so are they solicitous for our salvation. Let us, therefore, rely on their protection and intercession, and let us be fully determined to follow their example, which otherwise would be the source of our reprobation; let us live like the saints, let us labour like the saints, let us suffer like the saints, let us die like the saints—if we would reign with them in heaven and partake of their glory.

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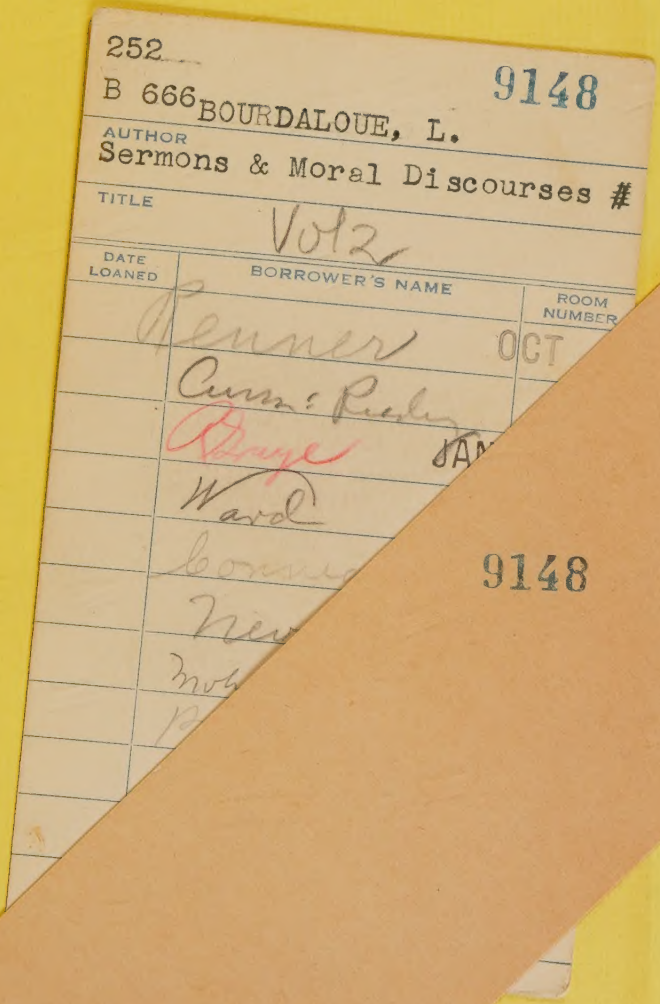
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